

NAG

SOUTH AFRICA'S LEADING TECHNOLOGY & COMPUTER GAMING MAGAZINE



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DUNGEON SIEGE II

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december 2004

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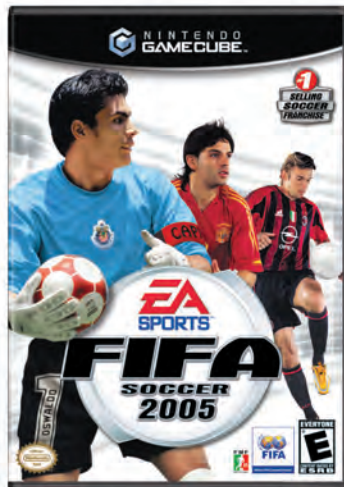
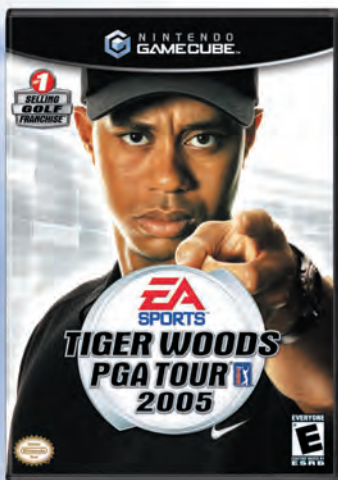
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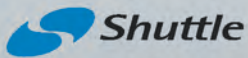
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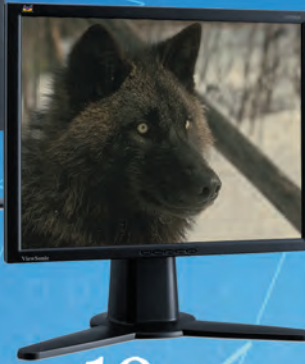
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PC
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Dungeon Siege II - this cover and subsequent article arrived just in the nick of time. Lucky for us because we didn't really have any kind of back-up plan other than let's do a collage of all the game characters in the December issue and add some lame happy Xmas line underneath. So, that's the whole story, the only interesting thing that has now become painfully apparent is that we run this magazine in much the same way as clowns would. Anyway go to page 32 and read the exclusive interview we did with Kevin Lambert, Lead Designer for Dungeon Siege 2. This interview is an important landmark because it's the first time we've successfully recorded an entire conversation on the telephone using nothing more than a computer. Scary I know...

Enough

It's already December and as I type this line of text I'm wondering where the whole year went. In this industry every time you look up from your monitor another month has disappeared; it's the deadlines you see and the fact that this industry has an annoying habit of changing on a daily basis, companies come and go, new games are announced and then cancelled and I'm not even going to start on hardware. But I'm not complaining, it's great and I really don't think any of us here would prefer to survive in any other kind of environment. It's traditional I expect to look back on the year and pass a few insightful comments and then daringly make a few predications for 2005. So here goes, and remember this is all just guess work.

2004

If the growth of NAG is anything to go by then 2004 represents the largest leap forward for the gaming industry in this country over the last few years. There are also more games than ever before - we've gone from lavish 2-3 page reviews on most games to a standard single page for most now. There's just so much arriving at the office on a daily basis that keeping up has been a challenge. During 2004 we've also been offered a number of international exclusives and have spent more time travelling around the world on 'legitimate' business trips than ever before. Locally the pressure is mounting because people are taking what we say much more seriously than in the past - thanks in part to our ever increasing readership and in part to the overall growth of gaming in South Africa and more importantly all the expensive hardware that supports it. So things are good and getting better, how this plays out next year is always interesting guesswork but what I can elaborate on a little is what we have planned.

2005

If things continue like they have been you will see the size of NAG increase, we're not stuck in any strict formulae when it comes to adverts versus number of pages so we are always free to bring our readers the best possible combination of magazine elements. Because we're a top secret organisation this is all I can share at the moment so you'll have to get by on, "NAG will get bigger and better, we promise". In terms of games, E3 in May is always very interesting

because publishers are always trying to get the games shown at E3 in stores before the end of the year. E3 is also when the PS3 console will be unveiled to the world. As usual we'll have a full report on E3 in July on this gaming phenomenon. Hardware is always improving and I expect that 2005 will see PCI express utilised a little better and I don't even want to speculate on cooling innovations - cooling just gets more weird and out of control by the week. There, hopefully that was vague and cryptic enough to keep you coming back for more next year.

Other things

Enjoy the DOOM 3 expansion article - this was a scoop for NAG that unfortunately came at the wrong time - Activision has dominated our cover for long enough so we elected to go with Microsoft instead [Bill pays bigger bribes]. Besides Dungeon Siege II and DOOM 3: Resurrection of Evil we also have Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory and an interesting title called Darwinia. I'm going on about these previews to highlight my point about 2005 - it keeps getting better and ending off 2004 with so many huge previews is a great way to ensure you all understand just how good things are looking.

In other news I'd like to welcome a veteran writer back into our freelance stable - none other than Warren Steven, one of the founding members of NAG who has finally figured out that he just can't stay away from games and telling everyone what he thinks about them. Welcome back.

To wrap up - enjoy the holidays and drive safely and we'll see you next year. Remember the January issue of NAG will be available 23 December 2004 [complete with our review of Half-Life 2 - finally!]

Michael James
[Editor]

PS: Go to the NAG website and participate in our 2004 game awards. If you have an opinion about the best game in 2004 - go here and tell the world:
www.nag.co.za

It's back!



Dark, dank and full of babes



Caption of the Month

Each month we'll select a screenshot from one of the games in the issue and write a funny caption for it, well... we'll try and make it funny...

Your job is to see if you can come up with an even funnier caption and send it to: ed@nag.co.za
Subject: **December Caption**

If you use the wrong subject in your e-mail it'll get deleted...

Your prize: Our sponsor for the screenshot of the month competition is Vivendi Universal Games. They said they'll give us something interesting each month... if we don't want it we'll be sure to send it along to the winner mentioned under this block of text.



NAG's December Caption



'Honey... bring me a beer' - NAG's [.62% lame]

October winner



SA Projectionist Training Centre [SAPTC]: "As you can see the projector needs to be off centre by 9.6 degrees with a blur factor of 14.58%..." - Justin Wilson

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Specification

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Gigabyte GA-8SG800 Motherboard
NVIDIA GeForce4 Ti 4200 with AGP8X
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FM Tuner & Remote
Control



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		EX65PE	EX65	EX18
CPU	TYPE	Intel P4/Celeron	Intel P4/Celeron	AMD K7
	FSB	400/533/800	400/533/800	200/266/333
CHIPSET		Intel 865PE / ICH5	Intel 865PE / ICH5	nForce2-GT/MCP-T
VGA		None	8X AGP (OnDie)	8X AGP (OnDie)
SOUND		AC97 5.1	AC97 5.1	AC97 5.1
LAN		10/100/1000	10/100/1000	10/100/1000
SATA		2	2	None
USB2.0		2	2	2
IEEE1394		2	2	1
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CRN Outlook Awards: AOpen Desktop PC
"Channel Champions 2003"

Looking back...

words james francis

Are you ready? The Christmas season is upon us and that means a whole ton of games ready to be played. But it's not time for a tirade on the merchandise-heavy holiday period. Instead, let's have a quick look at what 2004 brought along to gaming.

First and foremost are Shaders. I'm still at a loss with how exactly they work, but I have the basics down and it's an impressive piece of graphic technology, but sadly one that is very under-utilized (or mostly just implemented very badly) by developers. Games such as Far Cry would not have seen the day without pixel and vertex shaders and they've made a lasting impact on the industry. Sure, shaders appeared before this year, but 2004 saw the world embracing them in its own lop-sided fashion.

Mobile gaming also had a good year, if only in industry reports and statistics. While games on our cells still have to see their boom period, 2004 got a lot of noise on the topic, locally echoed by the arrival of MTN's content service, which prompted Vodacom to do the same, both joining local stalwart Exactmobile in delivering Java-powered goodness to your phone. Before 2004 Java-capable phones weren't all over the show either, so the scene can only grow from here.

2004 was also the year of Middleware. This time-saving technology really saw a big surge in its public profile starting with the ever-present Renderware logo. The boys at Criterion had two major boosts to their name this year: first was the ridiculous success of the GTA games (which uses Renderware) and then EA's high-profile purchase of the developer, which in turned helped birth the brain-frying Burnout 3. And at E3 this year at least five developers named Havok physics as a feature in their PlayStation 2 game. In 2004 Middleware went from developer's tool to marketing subject. So what does 2005 hold? Let's chat about that in January...

on the wire



Batman Begins

Can EA do a better job with Batman than they did with Catwoman?

Electronic Arts has revealed that it has acquired the publishing rights to its upcoming title Batman Begins, which deals with Bruce Wayne aka Batman's earliest exploits. Eurocom will handle development of versions for PlayStation 2, GameCube and Xbox, while Vicarious Visions will be responsible for the Game Boy Advance and PSP versions. All versions are scheduled for release next year.

New AMD processors

AMD steps up with a new offering

AMD has announced the Athlon 64 4000+ and Athlon 64 FX-55 processors. Both are built for Socket 939, sport dual-channel memory controllers and 1MB of L2 cache. The 4000+ is clocked at 2.4GHz, while the FX-55 is clocked at 2.6GHz. The current crop is being manufactured on the 130nm fabrication process, rather than the new 90nm process. The AMD 64 chips, aimed at high-end desktop computers, set the new records in a variety of industrial benchmarks and solidify AMD's position as a leading maker of high-end chips for personal computers. Intel is expected to respond with some impressive new toys, all clocked well north of 3GHz.



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Sony acknowledges PSP battery shortcomings

Portable player woes continue

Sony president Ken Kutaragi admitted in an interview with a Japanese publication that the PSP's battery might not even make the six hour mark when playing graphically intensive games. The PSP, or PlayStation Portable, has been at the brunt of criticism from analysts, publishers and specifically Nintendo, who suggested the batteries might have as little power as two hours. Still, six hours is a bad figure and one likely to frustrate many future owners of the device, not to mention dissuade a lot of potential customers, especially during the crucial launch period.

The problems continue as momentum builds behind speculation that the PSP will be delayed and not see the US market until late 2005. Instead of being idle industry gossip, these are views that have been aired by several prominent publishers. US retailers have also apparently been asked to pull advertising announcing the console's December release.

On the bright side, the portable version of Gran Turismo 4 has been confirmed for Q2 2005, though that's only in Japan with no western release date forthcoming.

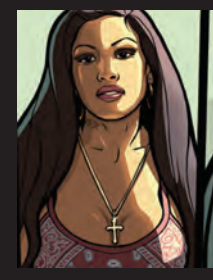
Medal of Honor: Dogs of War

Electronic Arts is at work on Medal of Honor: Dogs of War for PlayStation 2, Xbox and GameCube, to be released in the early months of next year. The announcement was accompanied by cryptic references to "a new way of playing", though no explanation of what this might be was offered.

San Andreas breaks records Fifth GTA game could beat Titanic

Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas proved extremely popular on its opening weekend. British sales tracking firm Chart-Track estimated that the game sold over 677,000 units in the UK alone, breaking the record of 250,000 held by GTA: Vice City. Overall, it's estimated that San Andreas sold over 1.5 million copies in its first three days of sale in Europe and analysts expect a similar figure from the US debut, bringing the total to a speculated 3 million until sold in an opening weekend.

To put it into perspective, apparently only ten PlayStation 2 games have surpassed that figure in their sales life. The analysts don't stop there, though, but we suppose they get paid for this kind of thing. According to a Reuters article, analyst firm American Technology Research estimates the game will sell at least 15 million copies, beating Vice City's 12 million. If this is the case, at \$50 a pop, San Andreas will gross more money than Titanic did - by over \$100 million. Titanic is still the biggest box-office grosser with takings of over \$1 billion.





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Chop Suey

words ed dracon

It was during that customary lack of concentration preceding a yawn that I, an intelligent and talented person, was quite surprised when I managed to gingerly stick my hand into the ceiling fan.

Blood splattered everywhere, men fainted, women clutched wailing babies to their chests while dogs howled lament. Or at least, that's what should have happened considering how much my hand hurt. Instead, all I have to show for my stupidity is a rather unimpressive bruise and a mediocre cut. The entire experience was rather like thrusting your hand into a spinning set of blades, only to mildly say 'Ow'. In retelling, this may have become a clever gaming related metaphor, had I a moral to the story better than "look up before you yawn".

Amusing anecdote aside and on an almost entirely unrelated note, I was shocked to recently discover that I've outgrown LAN parties. Perhaps it's the fact that over the course of the last 10 odd years, not much has changed at your typical LAN. Perhaps it's simply just me moving on. A combination of the two might also attribute. Regardless, the concept of several computers, networked and playing games, just doesn't do it for me anymore. The thought has crossed my mind that perhaps it's the stagnation of multiplayer games/gamers and the rampant piracy that puts me off. Who in their right mind wants to play yet another round of Counter-Strike or one of its clones, for the 4-billionth time? Oh, yes... those who are aiming for the big prize money and vain attempt at making gaming a 'sport' so that they can justify their hobbies to their parents. Suddenly sticking more than just my hand into a set of spinning death blades seems appealing.

miktar's soapbox



The world's deadliest assassin returns

Agent 47 hits hard with blood money

Eidos has announced that the next instalment in the Hitman series will be released on the PC, PlayStation 2 and Xbox towards the middle of 2005.

Hitman: Blood Money is being powered by a new version of Io's Glacier engine, and promises to deliver both a realistic and brutal life simulation as Agent 47, the world's deadliest assassin, hits the streets of America sporting a cache of weapons and a taste for the kill.

"Considerable time and effort has been spent developing a new version of the Glacier engine that enables us to implement many new and exciting features. The quality of the graphics and A.I. surpasses even our own expectations and this combined with a gripping narrative and the introduction of some really inventive characters makes us confident that Blood Money will be the greatest Hitman title to date," says Janos Flösser, managing director of Io-Interactive. www.hitman.com



Cold Fear

Next March Ubisoft will release Cold Fear on PC, PlayStation 2 and Xbox. This action-horror title from Darkworks is set aboard a ship and an oil-rig in the Bering Sea. The game will feature a highly interactive environment, far beyond the rocking of the boat, and a host of bad guys to deal with, of course.

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Viewtiful Joe 2 loses co-op

Even with a girlfriend you still play with yourself

Reports from US media based on preview copies of Capcom's Viewtiful Joe 2 reveal that the company has decided to drop co-op gameplay. Having made no official announcement to this affect, it would seem the company wanted to slip the omission under the radar and as yet neither Capcom nor developer Clover Studio has explained why the feature was dropped.

Co-op gameplay was originally touted as a feature as the sequel will feature Joe and his girlfriend Sylvia as playable characters. It still allows players to switch between the two characters at any time, but the gameplay is restricted to one player. The move emulates a trend seen a lot in modern platformers, since co-operative gameplay used to be a stalwart feature of older side-scrolling games.

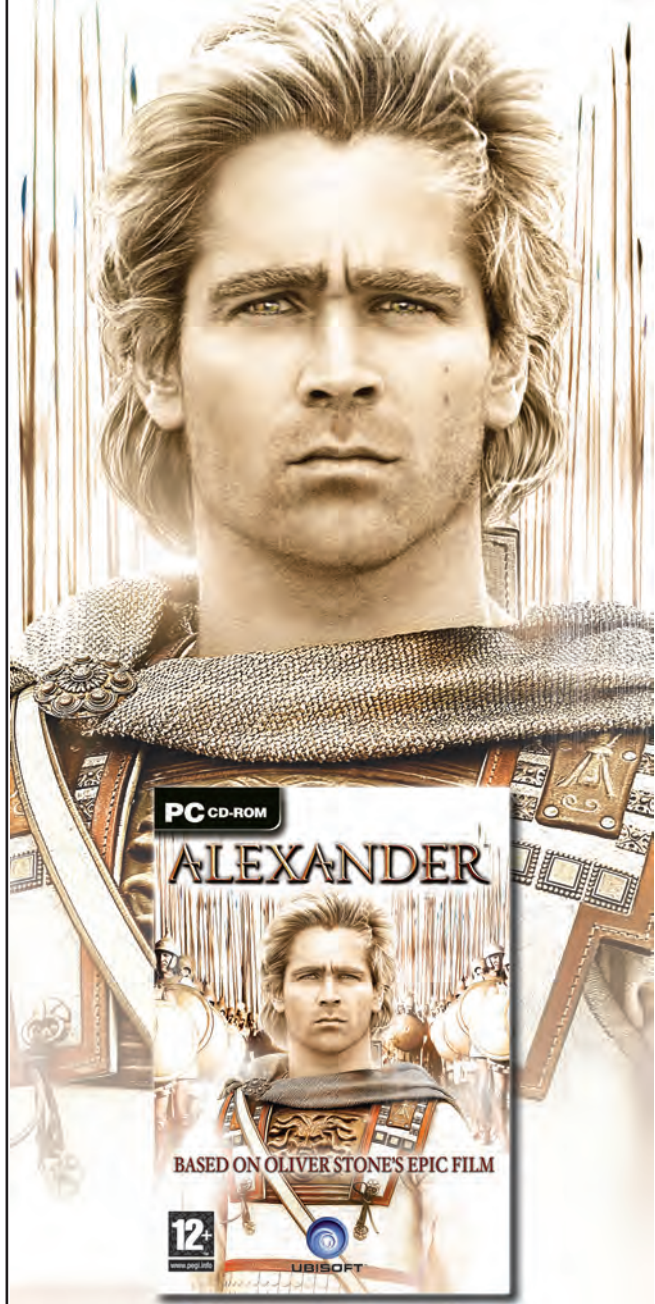
Boiling Point: Road to Hell

To be released by Atari by mid-2005, this first-person shooter from Ukrainian company Deep Shadows will boast a massive streaming open-ended game world presented seamlessly. A wide variety of vehicles and weapons will be available, and players will interact with a host of AI factions. Sounds like Freelancer in the South American jungles.



US retailers stop taking DS pre-orders But for all the right reasons

US retailers Gamestop and EB Games have announced that they won't take any more pre-orders for Nintendo's dual-screen DS handheld. The reason: demand has outstripped supply and the retailers have already exhausted their allotted pre-order numbers. This comes alongside Nintendo's new campaign, somewhat dubiously called "Touching is Good". The publisher argues that it's to appeal to older audiences under the logic that as a kid you were told to look but not touch. We're not sure the slogan has quite such sterling intentions and we had our doubts, but the release of the DS ad starring MTV Wildboyz Steve O and Chris Pontius proved a swing in Nintendo's approach and should definitely appeal to a larger audience than their traditional advertising campaigns, which were mostly geared towards younger players and Nintendo fans. The DS' fortunes are reflected in Japan, where the system managed to take the third spot for top-selling systems in Japan, right behind the PlayStation 2 and GBA SP - not bad since these are all pre-orders. It thus also managed to take more pre-orders for that week than Sony's new, smaller PStwo.



Alexander

Alexander is the officially licensed real-time strategy PC game tied to Oliver Stone's upcoming "Alexander" movie starring Colin Farrell. Integrating exclusive footage from the motion picture, the game immerses players in the era of Alexander the Great. Like Alexander, players will face the challenges of managing vast resources, a multitude of units, buildings and advancements, while his enemies always seem to have more of everything.

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PStwo dominates UK sales

It's going to be another Sony Christmas

Upon its first week of sales in the UK, Sony's new slimmer PStwo managed to sell over 50,000 units, outselling the Xbox by two to one, though Microsoft's console is still experiencing a slow rise in sales, and embarrassingly outdoing GameCube sales by sixteen-to-one. The lightweight console is an attractive product since its 75% smaller size makes the console far more portable than its chubbier cousin. It's also fair to note that the record-breaking sales of San Andreas boosted the console's popularity and it's bound to remain a sell-out success through the important Holiday period.



PSP launch details

The PlayStation Portable will launch in Japan on 12 December, along with 21 games that will be released before year's end. These titles include Need for Speed Underground Rivals, Tiger Woods PGA Tour, Ridge Racer, Metal Gear Acid, Vampire Chronicle and Dynasty Warriors. Over a hundred games are currently in development for the system, to be released at various points in the future. The handheld's battery life has been specified as between 4 and 6 hours, assuming average power consumption conditions. A range of accessories will be released simultaneously, as well as a PSP Value Pack, which will consist of the console and the accessories bundled together. The PSP is expected to launch early next year outside Japan.



Gran Turismo 4 delayed in Europe

The release of the European version of Gran Turismo 4 has slipped to early next year, due to difficulties in the localisation process, which entails 13 different languages. The American and Japanese versions of the game will still ship in time for Christmas.



Brothers in Arms 2

A sequel to the World War II shooter Brothers in Arms is already in preliminary development at Gearbox. The second offering will focus on some historically significant engagements, such as Operation Market Square and the Battle of the Bulge.

Hollywood keeps invading games as Christopher Lee and **Heather Graham** have been cast to render voices in Sony's upcoming Everquest II.

Champions of Kamigawa, Wizards of the Coast's latest expansion to the trading card game **Magic: The Gathering**, is now also available on Magic Online.

Black & White 2 developer Lionhead has secured a multi-million pound venture capital investment, which president **Peter Molyneux** says will give the studio more flexibility with future games and negotiations.

Avalanche Studios, in Sweden, is at work on an action game titled Just Cause, to be published by **Eidos** next year.

Owners of Sony's faltering **PSX console** won't be able to benefit from the new features in the upcoming models as upgrade options won't be available.

SCI received an honour by being listed as the only games developer in **Europe's 500 fastest growing companies** list. They ranked at 207. DreamCatcher managed a similar feat by getting ranked at 133 in the Deloitte Technology Fast 500, based on the US market.

3D Realms has chosen Swedish company Meqon as the provider of the physics engine for the upcoming **Duke Nukem Forever** (which has, so far, taken forever!) The engine simulates characters and vehicles as well as rigid body dynamics, and was chosen largely for its ease of use.

Nickelodeon made THQ's day by signing a long-term contract with the publisher, allowing them to develop games on the channels' popular franchises until 2010, ending speculation that it might go to Midway.

Lionhead has suspended development on the promising **B.C.** In development at satellite studio Intrepid, the company didn't indicate if and when development would start again.

Nokia has unveiled a new mobile game delivery platform called Preminet, built to help distribute mobile games and applications.

Japanese company Typhoon has announced that it will be releasing a **Hello Kitty** massively multiplayer game in Japan and parts of Asia. The 30-year old kitten and her friends are extremely popular in the region.

The Punisher

WE MARVEL AT ANOTHER PIXEL VIGILANTE

January will see the release of The Punisher on PC, PlayStation 2 and Xbox. The game is being developed by Volition, published by THQ, and features the voice talent of Thomas Jane, who starred in the film of the same name.

"The Punisher is one of Marvel's grittiest heroes delivering a unique brand of vigilante justice that is a perfect fit for the video game universe," said Germaine Gioia, Vice President of Licensing, THQ. "We look forward to working with Marvel in bringing a perfect blend of classic comic book and filmed franchise versions of The Punisher to console gamers across the globe."



Revenge of the Sith games coming

Ubisoft and LucasArts have entered into a licensing agreement to develop games based on the upcoming film Star Wars: Revenge of the Sith. The games will be released in conjunction with the movie's launch and will be available on handheld platforms, namely Game Boy Advance, Nintendo DS and Sony PSP.



Warhammer Online

Climax is still at work on Warhammer Online, in contradiction to rumours that emerged in June regarding the massively multiplayer game's cancellation. Games Workshop is aiding in the development of the title, although it appears the company's backing isn't extending beyond conceptual aspects. Climax is tentatively planning to launch Warhammer Online in a year and a half's time.



Syberia II

Embarking on a desperate search for Hans Voralberg, Kate Walker crosses Europe from West to East. She has left behind all her worldly possessions with the express purpose of joining the heir of the Voralberg family on his journey. Together, through mystical and enchanting lands, they will find their way to the mythical Syberia, land of the forgotten mammoths. Thus Syberia II begins...

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X-Men Legends sequel

Raven Software is working on a sequel to the action role-playing game, X-Men Legends. "Marvel and Activision are committed to ensuring that the series will continue to be a top game franchise for years to come." Ames Kirshen, Marvel.



Soul Quest

Soul Quest is the working title of revoltage's upcoming turn-based role-playing strategy title. The game will feature six races, and the latest in cutting-edge graphical technology, quite novel in a turn-based title.

Halo 2 pirated before release

Another shooter, another piracy story

Halo 2 became the latest hapless victim in a recent series of events that saw prominent games being leaked onto the Internet before their release. The game appeared on newsgroups and Torrent streams mere days after developer Bungie announced that it has completed the game and shipped it off to manufacturing - nearly a full month before the game's release date. Both the developer and publisher Microsoft, who can definitely count Bungie and the Halo series as their trump card for the Christmas season, has slammed the leak, saying that they regard any download of the game as theft. Bungie also appealed to fans of the series to come forth with information that will capture the perpetrators, similar to what Valve did when Half-Life 2's infamous source-code theft occurred.

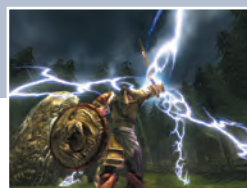
It's not a catastrophe, though. The game appears to be a French version with English subtitles, plus the full game, which come sin a weighty 3 gigabyte download size, can only be played on modded Xbox consoles - a small part of the Xbox-owning public; modded consoles are also not capable of using the popular Live broadband service. It can also be argued that considering Halo's popularity a lot of the pirates are likely to get the full game anyway, not to mention that even though the same fate befell Doom 3 before its release, the mass piracy did not deter the game from making a lot of money, so Halo 2 can easily be expected to live up to the same promise.

The game ran into some smaller problems close to its release as some retailers in the US started to sell the title before its release date - a common occurrence with big games and a thorn in the side for publishers, as they obviously would like to keep the playing ground level between the various retailers.



Web Scores

	[PC] Evil Genius	[PC] Rome Total War	[PC] Star Wars Battlefront	[PC] Tribes Vengeance
NAG [100]	86	85	81	71
gamespy.com [5]	4	4.5	3.5	4
gamespot.com [10]	7.3	9.1	7.9	8.8
pc.ign.com [10]	7.8	9.4	7.5	9
	[Xbox] Fable	[PS2] Conflict Vietnam	[PS2] Star Ocean	[PS2] Psi Ops: The Mindsgate Conspiracy
NAG [100]	69	68	80	85
gamespy.com [5]	4	2.5	3.5	4
gamespot.com [10]	8.6	6.1	7.9	8.4
ign.com [10]	9.3	6.7	9	8.5





Memory card albums

An American retail outlet has, with EMI Records' blessing, released Robbie Williams's Greatest Hits album on MMC memory card as well as more traditional media formats. This artist is merely the first, as EMI is considering distributing further artists' work in such formats in the near future, to facilitate the use of portable media players.

FIFA Street

Make your mark on the street

Electronic Arts Canada is at work on FIFA Street, a new soccer game that focuses on informal football. Something of a self-contradictory title, yes? FIFA is football's governing body, while street soccer is anything but "governed" or official in any sense! "What FIFA Street represents is a movement in football and a break from the modern game," says Wil Mozell, senior producer for the project. "We are stripping the sport down to its core and delivering a game that's all about freestyle attitude and individual skill, something I believe is at the heart of every football fan." FIFA Street is scheduled for release next year on GameCube, PS2 and Xbox.

www.fifastreet.com



S.T.A.L.K.E.R.: Shadow of Chernobyl slips

GAME IS DONE BUT FURTHER TESTING IS NEEDED

GSC World's upcoming S.T.A.L.K.E.R.: Shadow of Chernobyl, to be published by THQ, has been delayed by a couple of months, and is now expected by mid-2005. The reason stated for this delay is optimisation and testing of the title's dynamic life simulation system, which is crucial to the game. All other elements of the game have, reportedly, been completed. This ambitious title will combine elements of first-person shooters, adventure and survival horror genres.



Axis & Allies

World War II springs to life as you experience the most epic battles in the history of mankind. For the first time, the world's five superpowers battle for control on a truly global scale. Direct the military and economic destiny of Japan, England, Germany, Russia or Germany. With each battle fought in real-time, comes the opportunity to create a new destiny as you change the course of history itself.

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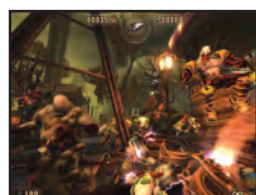
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International Release Dates

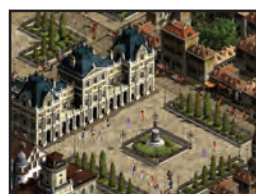


Duel Masters: Sempai Legends
GoldenEye: Rogue Agent
Mario Party Advance
Painkiller: Battle out of Hell
Prince of Persia: Warrior Within
Sid Meier's Pirates!
Armies of Exigo
Final Fantasy I & II: Dawn of Souls
Godzilla: Save the Earth
LOTR: The Battle For Middle-Earth
Zoo Keeper

Mario Party 6



SWKnights of the Old Republic II: The Sith Lords
Dark Age of Camelot: Catacombs
Viewtiful Joe 2
Championship Manager 5
Dragon Ball Z Budokai 2
American McGee's Oz
Conflict 4
Hello Kitty Online World
Miami Vice



Team Fortress 2: Brotherhood of Arms
Backyard Wrestling: Don't Try This at Home
Call of Cthulhu: Beyond the Mountains of Madness
Cold War Conflict
Conan

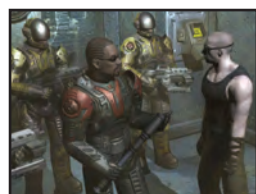
Cossacks II: Napoleonic Wars

Desperados 2: Cooper's Revenge
Divine Divinity 2
Earth 2160
Fear Factor: Unleashed



FlatOut
Galactic Civilizations: Altarian Prophecy
Gates of Troy
Hidden & Dangerous 2 Sabre Squadron
Knight Rider

Kreed
Lamborghini FX
NASCAR 2005



Serious Sam 2
Sonic DS

Starship Troopers
Starsiege 2845

State of Emergency 2

The Chronicles of Riddick: Escape from Butcher Bay

The Movies
The Settlers: Heritage of Kings
The X-Files: Resist or Serve
Universal Combat - Edge to Edge



Uru: Ages Beyond Myst
Pathway to Glory

Wars & Warriors: Joan of Arc

This is Football 2005

WWII Fighter Pilot

Yu-Gi-Oh! Power of Chaos: Joey the Passion

PS	Strategy	3/12/2004
GCN PS2 Xbox	Action	3/12/2004
GBA	Puzzle	3/12/2004
PC	Shooter	3/12/2004
GCN PC PS2 Xbox	Adventure	3/12/2004
PC	RPG	3/12/2004
PC	Strategy	10/12/2004
GBA	RPG	10/12/2004
PS2	Action	10/12/2004
PC	Strategy	10/12/2004
DS	Puzzle	15/12/2004
GCN	Party	15/12/2004
Xbox	RPG	15/12/2004
PC	RPG	15/12/2004
PS2	Fighting	15/12/2004
PC	Sports	15/12/2004
GCN	Fighting	21/12/2004
PC	Action	Q4 2004
PC	Action	Q4 2004
PC	RPG	Q4 2004
PS2 PC Xbox	Action	Q4 2004
PC	Shooter	Q4 2004
PC	Wrestling	Q4 2004
PC	Adventure	Q4 2004
PC	Strategy	Q4 2004
PC	Action	Q4 2004
PC	Strategy	Q4 2004
PC	Strategy	Q4 2004
PC	RPG	Q4 2004
PC	Strategy	Q4 2004
PC	Adventure	Q4 2004
PC Xbox	Racing	Q4 2004
PC	Strategy	Q4 2004
PC	Strategy	Q4 2004
PC	Action	Q4 2004
GCN	Racing	Q4 2004
PC	Action	Q4 2004
PC Xbox	Racing	Q4 2004
PC	Racing	Q4 2004
PC Xbox	Shooter	Q4 2004
DS	Action	Q4 2004
PC	Shooter	Q4 2004
PC	Simulation	Q4 2004
PC Xbox	Action	Q4 2004
PC	Shooter	Q4 2004
Xbox GCN	Simulation	Q4 2004
PC	Strategy	Q4 2004
Xbox	Adventure	Q4 2004
PC	Simulation	Q4 2004
Xbox	Puzzle	Q4 2004
GCN	Action	Q4 2004
Xbox	Action	Q4 2004
PS2	Sports	Q4 2004
PC	Flight	Q4 2004
PC	Strategy	Q4 2004



China games industry to boom

Once piracy haven, now new cash cow

China might have such small problems such as human right violations and the active censorship of pretty much everything, but it doesn't stop game publishers from looking at the world's biggest country.

Analysts predict that the industry could grow seven fold in the next two years to become a billion dollar business, mostly thanks to being an emerging market boasting around 200 million young people. It might not be as easy as that, though. China has already announced that it will maintain strict control over the content of games and promote "healthy" computer usage. The country recently closed several dozen internet cafes for allowing access to pornography, violent games, gambling and other activities the government deem unhealthy or subversive to the security of the state and its people, which means that a lot of popular games won't make it to the country, regardless.

This could impact a much wider range of games than one might think, especially since neighbouring North Korea recently accused Ghost Recon 2 of being subversive and western propaganda for featuring a renegade North Korean general as the villain. They might be two separate countries, but China shares a lot of the same ideologies as its neighbour.

China invades online gaming

Studies conducted by analysts indicate that by 2007 China's online gaming market will be the largest in the world. Besides the fact that China has the world's largest national population, the main factor in Chinese online gaming growth is, ironically, its rampant piracy - many companies have considered this country not to be a worthwhile investment, and so Chinese gamers have had nowhere else to turn to but the Internet.

China currently boasts 80 million Internet users, 15 million of whom have broadband access. Electronic Arts has announced that it will make China its global online games development centre, and plans to establish a studio employing around 500 people.

Gaming exposed to advertising media In-game advertising

Advertisers now have a resource that will allow them to plan advertising within games. The Cocosambo Guide, which is supported by leading games developers and publishers, is being published quarterly online and in print, and will be distributed to subscribers at major advertisers and agencies around the world. Michael Wood, a director of Cocosambo, said "For a couple of years now, advertisers have been asking us for an overview of the available opportunities in games, and it just has not existed. The Cocosambo Guide will enable advertisers, and their agencies, to find the games that work for them; allowing new brands to discover the power of games." Let's hope that this in-game advertising is limited to sponsor billboards at racetracks or sports-grounds and the like, and doesn't extend to actual adverts playing mid-game!

www.cocosambo.com



As Seen On TV

Nintendo take a ride with the Wildboyz as they advertise the Nintendo DS



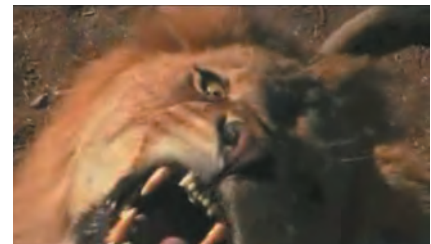
Steve O and his DS, sitting in a tree...



Meanwhile, buddy Chris Pontius is sitting on an elephant - and they are playing games against each other.



As you can see, even when surrounded by lions the DS' wireless feature makes multiplayer easy.



Of course the lions don't really care ...



... and one finds its way up to Steve, opting to chew on his head.

FROM BOY GENIUS TO EVIL GENIUS, DEMIS HASSABIS HAS CREATED BEST-SELLING GAMES, WORKED WITH PETER MOLYNEUX AND SET UP HIS OWN STUDIO. AND HE'S STILL YOUNG ENOUGH TO BE, WELL, YOUR SMART YOUNGER BROTHER...



"BY THE TIME I LOOK BACK ON MY CAREER I WANT TO HAVE MADE SOME KIND OF DIFFERENCE TO THE GAMES INDUSTRY AND TO HAVE LEFT BEHIND SOME LANDMARK GAMES THAT PEOPLE REALLY ENJOYED"

DEMIS HASSABIS, ELIXIR STUDIOS

DEMIS HASSABIS

Elixir Studios



Saying goodbye to the day job to start up your own company is one of the toughest decisions anyone could ever make. But as Elixir Studios founder, chairman and creative director Demis Hassabis will testify, it's the only way to get things just the way you want them. "I set [Elixir] up because I had the ideas in my mind for the games I wanted to make - Republic and Evil Genius being two of them - and the most likely way I was going to get to make them was to basically have my own company," he says. "The thing that people tell you is it's always going to be harder than you think. I went into it knowing it was going to be harder than I was thinking it was going to be... but it was harder than that even. It was harder than I ever imagined."


Hassabis is used to challenges; he taught himself chess at four years old, and at 12 was the highest-ranking player of his age in the world. He finished his A-levels at 15. At 17 co-created Theme Park with videogame veteran Peter Molyneux. And before helping Molyneux set up Lionhead Studios, Hassabis picked up a double first in computer science from Cambridge University. Surely setting up his own studio would be a cinch?

As Hassabis explains, the biggest challenges were rooted in Elixir's first game - the deeply ambitious and complex Republic. "The thing that really made [setting up Elixir] harder was that Republic was so ambitious, and then there's the technology - the technology was ambitious as well," he says. "If I were to do it again I would never build a game at the same time as the technology." But this wasn't the only hurdle. Elixir was a new company and, as such, was populated with staff fairly new to the business - a problem when you're trying to produce a game as complicated as Republic. "We had a lot of creativity and a lot of very good technical people, but we just didn't have people who had shipped out game after game," Hassabis explains.

Not only was Elixir trying to find its feet and understand what worked best, it was tasked with producing a highly ambitious game while at the same time inventing all-new, boundary-pushing technology. And as Hassabis concurs, the

fruit of Elixir's five-year labour didn't turn out exactly the way it should have done. "It needed another six months really to just polish it," he says. "We never got a chance to polish the interface, or the content or the pacing - the learning curve was vertical. We knew [the learning curve] was wrong but there was no more time to do anything about it - we had to release it for that financial quarter."

For Elixir's second game things had to change, and Hassabis looked to shake things up a little. "When we started our team for Evil Genius we sort of looked at what we'd done wrong with Republic in terms of its development process and clearly we didn't want to work on another five-year project," he says. "It's bad obviously from our financial point of view but also creatively you can get stagnant after two or three years. We took a long hard look at why that happened [with Republic] and the main reasons were some inexperienced beliefs (especially on the programming side), not enough production skills and building the game at the same time as unbelievably ambitious technology. All those things we basically corrected at that point and that makes for quite a different environment now. It's paid off and Evil Genius is the first proof."

With the hardship of setting up the company behind him, Hassabis is looking to the future, with three unannounced games currently in varying stages of development. "We've got lots of different plans, we've got a couple of very ambitious titles in the works [and] another signed game with a massive publisher that's actually going to be our next game," he reveals. And note the use of the word 'ambitious'. Even after having his fingers burnt by Republic, isn't Hassabis committing himself to 'safe' titles? "By the time I look back on my career [I want] to have made some kind of difference to the games industry and to have left behind some landmark games that people really enjoyed," he says. We'll take that as a 'no'. 

Evil Genius for PC is out now and is reviewed in this issue.

Deathsbane makes impact in Australia



Sean "Deathsbane" Marx, ex-member of the Counter-Strike team Evolve Aim, emigrated to Australia last year in order to further his education. However, he did not abandon his gaming career, and upon arriving down under, he set about establishing himself in the Australian scene. The result of his efforts was announced recently by Function Zero, Australia's number one Counter-Strike clan, and representatives at the Electronic Sports World Cup and the World Cyber Games in 2003. After the retirement of star player Ben "Nebu" Farrell, South Africa's Deathsbane was selected to fill the vacancy. He is only the second player with a foreign background to join one of Australia's top teams. Nebu explained that his retirement was due to work commitments, and not because of any animosity between him and the rest of the team. He also wished Deathsbane the best of luck. The full Function Zero line-up is now Deathsbane, Davio, Kurandus, Axion, and Fero.

Quake 3 Top 32 II



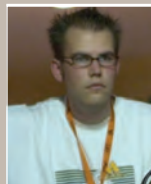
The competitive Quake 3 scene has died down quite a bit in the last year, but a few dedicated members of the community are taking steps to ensure that 2004 won't be the year on its epitaph. Following the success of the last Top 32 Invitational tournament, James "Shadowlord" Cloete is again at the helm. The competition, featuring 16 invited players and 16 wildcards, will take place on the 4th and 5th of December at a venue in Johannesburg. The specific place is still being confirmed, as well as possible sponsorship for the event. More information will be released on the tournament website in the coming weeks.
www.q3top32.za.net

CPL 2005 World Tour



The largest cash prize ever offered for a computer game tournament has been announced by the CPL (Cyberathlete Professional League) for their World Tour, which commences in February 2005 - a staggering US \$ 1,000,000. Over 10 000 gamers are expected to compete in the official tournament game, Painkiller, during the course of the ten month long tour.

The tour will travel to ten cities around the world with the first leg scheduled for 10 - 13 February 2005 in Istanbul Turkey.



Name: Cameron James Scott
Nick: Xpert
Age: 21
Games: WarCraft III (TFT and ROC) / Quake 3 / Counter-Strike

Achievements:

- Worfaire 2002 Prelims CS Tournament (Head Admin)
- Gamers Gate Carousel 2002 CS Tournament (Head Admin)
- Mayhem Offline League 2003 (Referee)
- ESWC WarCraft III Qualifier 2003 (Head Admin)
- WCG WarCraft III Qualifier 2003 (Head Admin)
- rAge 2003 WarCraft III (Head Admin)
- ESWC WarCraft III Qualifier 2004 (Head Admin)
- WCG WarCraft III Qualifier 2004 (Head Admin)
- rAge 2004 Age of Mythology (Head Admin)

Did you intend to get into tournament organisation, or did it just happen?

When I first started gaming in back in 2000, I never gave tournament organisation any thought. It all started when I was managing the Seventh Army, a CS clan with in excess of 40 members, back in 2002. Although the clan was never the best at any particular game, it was all fun. For those few months I really enjoyed it, and the whole managing / organising side of gaming started from there. I met a range of people involved in LANs, from the organisers to the top gamers. After Worfaire 2002 prelims, I was asked to admin the admins, if you will, and have been involved in every tournament since then.

Do you miss competing in the events yourself?

To be quite honest, no. After I got a taste of organising the events, I found it much more enjoyable than sitting playing the games. I actually got over the whole "game addict facade" quite quickly after it crossed my path. From my side, watching the top gamers compete is much more enjoyable.

What is the most difficult tournament you have ever run?

Funnily enough one would think it would be a CS tournament, but in fact I would have to say the toughest was the ESWC WarCraft III qualifier earlier this year, mainly because of the number of competitors.

What would you most like to see happen in the ZA gaming community?

Quite a number of things. Firstly, South Africa needs more sponsors, plain and simple. Secondly, a CPL qualifier would be off the hook! Finally, gamers need to be more dedicated to their teams, and teams need to stop changing players when they lose an event. One of the biggest reasons why SA gaming has not progressed as much as it should have is that the competitive level has dropped. Not only because of our attitudes towards events, but because the top gamers are not giving back to the community.

South Africa's Golden Boy

Not since Ph4ntom's 7th place achievement in Quake 3 at WCG 2002 has a South African player made it through the round robin stage of an international tournament. Thankfully, the losing streak has now been broken, and in spectacular style too.

After winning the local qualifier, Nico-Louis "Mielie" Joubert carried his team and his country's flag through to San Francisco, to compete against the best Unreal Tournament 2004 players planet earth had to offer. Unlike many previous UT2004 competitions, there were no big names missing from the list of competitors. The likes of triple world champion Christian "GitzZz" Hoeck, Cyber X Games winner Laurence "Lauke" Pluymaekers, WCG 2003 winner Nicola "Forrest" Geretti, and ESWC 2004 victor Maurice "BurningDeath" Engelhardt all graced the arena. The Basilisk met with Mielie shortly after his return to speak about his experiences overseas.

Mielie was placed in group I, along with Tears from New Zealand, Petrucci from Chile and Serm from Venezuela. The usual poor showing in Counter-Strike (Damage Control) and WarCraft III (Anthony "Juvenile" Fellowes) did not discourage him, and he went on to win all three of his group matches convincingly, including a 6-1 victory over the experienced group favourite, Tears. "From my experience so far, I've come to realise that it's mainly about two things: quality practise and controlling your nerves," said Mielie. "The current state of our telecommunications infrastructure and the low level of sponsorship makes it an enormous challenge for a South African player to do well, but it isn't impossible."

After winning his group, Mielie went on to play his first best-of-three match in the single elimination bracket. Group I was drawn against group H, and as such he would have faced either Germany's BurningDeath or the Ukraine's Chip_Mask - his first place group finish put him against Chip. "We started out really close on both maps," said Mielie, "but as the games progressed, it became clear that my aim wasn't as consistent as his, which resulted in the pressure being on me rather than him. I then started missing crucial shots, and soon after that it was game over. Close, but not yet." Mielie lost 14-8 on DM-Rankin and 14-9 on DM-Ironic. Further into the tournament, the scale of his achievement against Chip became apparent. The Ukraine player went on to defeat all of his subsequent opponents, including the renowned GitzZz, losing only to the eventual winner, Lauke, in the semi-final. Chip finished third overall. Second was BurningDeath.

Mielie also spoke about his plans for the year to come, and about how his achievement has affected his gaming career. "The experience alone is enough to motivate you," he said, "but getting so close to beating a top international player translates into about ten times that amount of motivation. Of course, back in South Africa, life happens and you realise that it might be more advantageous to put your time into something else, due to the high risk (that is, if you don't have a reasonable sponsor), but I, and the rest of Team 42, will definitely still be competing next year." Finally, he commented on the state of the local scene in general. "In my opinion, we need more serious and dedicated players who want to make something more out of their gaming hobby. But more importantly, we need cheaper and faster internet connections, as well as more sponsors for those players who are prepared to commit."

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The Domain of The_Basilisk

is go!




EYE FOR AN EYE

Violence in computer games is commonplace. Countless fighting titles and battle simulations hit the shelves every month; we see plenty of animated blood and gore in games rated "Teen"; and in fact, I'm not even sure I can name a game off the top of my head where the object isn't to kill someone or something [*Tetris?* Ed]. It's quite clear from our favoured choice of subject matter that violence is a part of human nature. For millennia, we have found the solutions to all sorts of problems by taking up arms and marching off to war. The manifestation of this violent nature in games is, then, unsurprising. But, when you think about it, not all that much fuss is made over most of these games, even though they include scenes and activities of particularly graphic nature. Aside from the odd sensationalist generalization, the general public has no problem with this violence. On the other hand, what always gets people going (and in fascinating ways) are games such as *Grand Theft Auto* or *Manhunt*. We've all heard the stories. Every time some deranged hillbilly child takes a sniper rifle from his parents' bedroom and proceeds to shoot at motorists on the highway, one of these special games gets blamed. What is it that makes them special? Quite simply, in these games, the bad guy wins.

Despite a host of criticism and pressure, these games refuse to die out, and so there must be a good reason to explain their resilience. Firstly, why are they even made? If their presence is so innately offensive, why do companies such as Rockstar still insist on developing them? There are many possible explanations, but my current theory is that such games are a logical product of Hollywood. One of the major conventions in Hollywood productions is that the hero must save the day, get the girl and everyone must live happily ever after. Now, every trend will have opposites that spring up in response. Hollywood is not part of the games industry, but nevertheless it has a huge influence on entertainment worldwide. As a reaction to the trend of happy endings and triumphant good guys (which I personally find bland), companies will risk public scorn purely in order to stand out - to do something different. This happens in Hollywood itself as well, but it is rare for the bad guy to be completely evil. For example, in films such as *Fight Club* and *Swordfish*, the "bad guy" is actually a revolutionary who stands for admirable ideals. In the game industry, the pressure is not quite as great, and we do see the occasional reaction formation of a game like *Manhunt*. This, I believe, is one of the main contributing factors to why such games are produced. And it's paying off. Many of us are attracted by novelty, and being able to play the bad guy and get away with it is a novel experience.

Even though the developers take flak from parent associations, ratings boards and opportunistic lawyers, they are making a lot of money, and we, the players, are loving every minute of it. This brings me to the second point of the article: why do we enjoy playing the bad guy? Novelty doesn't last forever, and on its own it cannot explain why "bad guy" games are so popular. The reason, as I see it, is a psychological one. Now, I have not yet conducted any studies to substantiate my theory, and any budding research psychologists are welcome to put together an experiment to verify or disprove it, but I have constructed it from logic, and it appears, at least on the surface, to have some merit. It can be said that we all desire the things we do not (or can not) have. Our covetous nature longs for the unrequited. Most normal members of the public would not walk around murdering people at whim; and so the desire to express evil becomes strengthened by the constraints of society. It can be expressed, in a cathartic sort of way, by playing the villain in a computer game. Not to mention it's just plain fun. In addition to this, human beings have what I like to call the "kitten tendency". Many will deny these impulses, but most of us do experience a constant urge to create chaos around us, purely for its own sake. This is the urge to kill cute animals, to leap off tall buildings or to steer into oncoming traffic. These basic, animal tendencies, are, according to Sigmund Freud, buried deep in our unconscious,

and they conflict with the expectations placed upon us by society. "Bad guy" games are a moral outlet for the frustration that results from this conflict, and psychodynamic psychologists in Freud's school of thought would argue for the inherent psychological benefits of playing them.

This is, of course, assuming the player is of sound mental health. The ability to distinguish fantasy from reality is essential, and if the lines become blurred, we get such dangerous cases as the highway sniper mentioned above. I have argued in the past, and still maintain to this day, that games are not the primary motivating factor in these cases. If the kid wasn't playing *Grand Theft Auto*, he would have been pushed over the edge by a number of other things - bullying at school, playing with toy soldiers or pure violent fantasizing to name but a few. In the end, there is something satisfying about taking a baseball bat to a crowd of innocent pedestrians after a stressful day at the office. "Bad guy" games, then, play an important role in managing tension among the working (and studying) population. Obviously the age restriction on such games must be enforced, psychopaths should stay clear, and parents should always be aware of what their children are playing, but in the end I think these games do more good than harm and should always be a part of the gaming industry. 

ASUS also offers several other AI Proactive features

Stack Cool™ - Cooler overclocking and quieter operation

Stack Cool technology utilizes a mini PCB stacked against the main PCB to conduct heat away from power components, resulting in a 10° Celsius temperature reduction. This fan-less design enables cooler overclocking, greater stability and longer system life without an extra noisy fan.

CPU Lock Free

CPU Lock Free unlocked the CPU multiplier restrictions set by Intel on its processor. Users usually tweak their systems either by increasing FSB frequency or CPU multiplier, which is locked for the Pentium 4 CPU. ASUS motherboards now offer CPU Lock Free, which enables CPU multiplier adjustment. Multiplier reduction provides more flexibility for increasing FSB frequency without raising CPU clockspeed, successfully improving data transfer between the CPU and memory modules.

PEG Link

PEG (PCI-Express Graphics) Link significantly boosts performance of PCI-Express graphics cards to deliver superior video quality. On traditional platforms, users can't manually tweak graphics card performance since the driver controls graphics card overclockability. PEG Link, a BIOS-based feature, is specifically created to eliminate this limitation. It automatically detects system configuration and adjust related parameters to provide powerful visual performance

ASUS
www.asus.com

Enhance Performance Without Lifting a Finger

ASUS Intelligent Overclocking Features Boost System Performance When it's Most Needed

Don't know how to overclock? Get AI Features

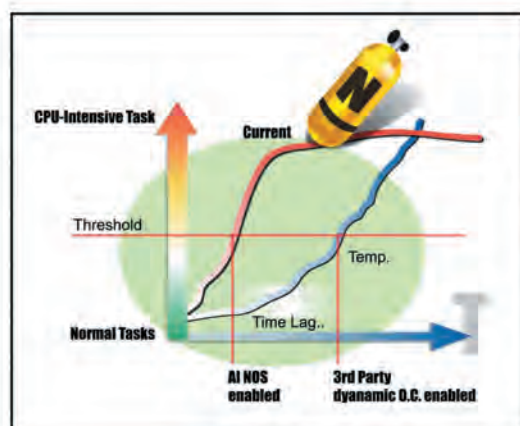
It doesn't matter how fast PCs have become or will become, there will always be users who want more speed and more power. The most effective way to boost performance and find out the real potential of your existing PC is through overclocking.

In the past, overclocking required a certain degree of tech-savvy since it was a complicated process that involved switching quartz oscillator and adjusting parameter jumpers. Though overclocking is now much simpler with most of the adjustments done in BIOS, users still have to gain necessary experiences through trial and error to become more efficient in tuning settings.

ASUS recently introduced the AI (ASUS Intelligence) Proactive Motherboard Series, which incorporated smart innovations for raising system performance. These features are user friendly and take only a few easy steps to activate.

AI NOS – Detect power consumption and overclock

Different combinations of motherboards, processors and



AI NOS detects CPU power consumption and boosts performance when it's most needed.



ASUS AI Proactive motherboards incorporated convenient overclocking innovations.

memory modules result in different setting adjustments during overclocking, which is very confusing for users without the technical know-how.

AI NOS (Non-delay Overclocking System) is an automatic overclocking mechanism on ASUS motherboards based on Intel's 915 and 925 chipsets. Without lifting a finger, this exclusive feature intelligently monitors processor loading and raise CPU performance. No more complex settings!!

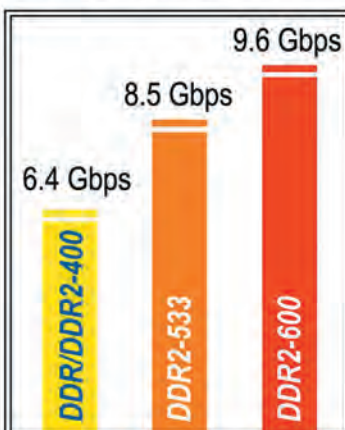
Overclocking systems offered by other motherboard makers detect CPU temperature. However, high temperature doesn't translate to high CPU loading. It takes a certain amount of time for processors to heat up from heavy workload, meaning by the time these temperature-based systems activate, CPU loading most likely already returned to a normal level. AI NOS, on the other hand, monitors CPU loading by detecting power consumption. Processors

consume more power when it's overworked, and thus AI NOS boosts system performance when it's needed the most.

Exclusive native support for DDRII 600

Memory is another very important aspect for improving computing performance. Since the 915 and 925 chipsets only support up to DDRII 533, to enjoy DDRII 600 on these boards, users must first increase FSB (front-side-bus) frequency. Unfortunately, most CPU probably can't handle this type of system bus overclocking.

ASUS' AI Proactive Motherboards, with superior engineering, enabled native support for DDRII 600 despite running on the 915 and 925 chipsets. No need to mess around with the FSB. Simply install DDRII 600 modules on the ASUS AI Proactive Motherboards for enhanced performance.



DDRII 600 offers larger memory bandwidth

With the processor and memory, the two main factors for system performance, taken care of, it is no wonder that many hardware testing media are calling AI Proactive Motherboards the most overclockable solutions for Intel's 915 and 925 chipsets.

If you have any query, please contact ASUS at (011) 783 5450

INBOX

Letter of the moment

FROM Wraith

SUBJECT Gaming 'Legends'

No, this letter is not about Peter Molyneux or John Carmack - it's about a few guys that are in my school. They shall remain nameless to protect their reputations (if they deserve it). The thing that bugs me about these guys is the fact that they think that they own the ground that mere mortals walk on. They both went to rAge but only one competed and he did pretty well, don't get me wrong he is good at CS. But being better than someone at a game isn't a licence to laugh at every other poor sod that says, hey guys should we get a clan together to go to Mayhem, you know, just for fun? Emphasis on the fun, gaming is fun last time I checked. Up to now I haven't been to a properly organised event like Mayhem or Arena 77. But do I really want to if the people there are like these guys? Will I walk through the doors and get gunned down by everyone because I ask some guy who I know is better than me at a game to a game? I know a lot of people that really enjoy gaming but few of them have ever been to a proper event. And I don't think any of us ever will considering the "ambassadors" that I know. So my question through all of this is does the fact that you're better mean that you can tell everyone else that they suck, lag and don't stand a snow-balls chance in hell against the newbie league and laugh them off when they say they fancy a friendly game sometime?

Why don't you stop worrying about what might happen and just give it a try? There's an Arena 77 event coming up soon [www.arena77.com] that'll feature an open LAN that you and a few mates should attend. Don't be put off by one or two arrogant apes and remember that they're certainly not 'ambassadors' of anything. Just remember wax on wax off. I have found that most communities are really amazing when it comes to welcoming newcomers - this is a growing industry and the more people that play games in this country the better for everyone and anyone who is too 'smart' to realise this isn't the kind of people we need. Just think, they didn't get their letter published in NAG and they didn't win 2 cool games from Electronic Arts. Who rules now? NAG Ed.

FROM yUdi

SUBJECT Cryptic

On your recent cover CD's there have been rather cryptic words. The latest one being "Stulon". What is the purpose of them? A hidden clue to a new, umm... ATi X800?

Not even close. If you examine the cover CD closely you'll see it features a graphic that's supposed to resemble a planet - each month we feature a different planet and the cryptic words are in fact the names of the different planets. Now go back to yours. NAG Ed.

FROM yUdi

SUBJECT FPS

What does FPS stand for? First Person Shooter? That's what we all thought but after 2 minutes of research I have determined that FPS stands for: Fist, Pistol and Shotgun. Think of DOOM and Duke 3D, what were the first three weapons? A fist, a pistol and a shotgun. You see, id created a genre which they called FPS however they did not explain what FPS was. After a few developers (like 3D Realms) 'borrowed' the idea someone said, "hey, what does FPS stand for?" It was then wrongly assumed that FPS stood for First Person Shooter.

Interesting idea - I do like your version. Now the problem comes in classifying a game like Far Cry into a genre, if it's not a FPS then what is it? A dra-

matic island holiday adventure and remember there's also a knife in there somewhere - any ideas anyone? NAG Ed.

FROM Temperantia

SUBJECT Scoring system comments

First of all I would like to congratulate all the reviewers on the mostly excellent reviews. Even though the content of the reviews is superb and the marking generally fair, I would like to comment on two aspects. Firstly I have noticed that the average mark given is declining steadily. (77 - 75 - 76 - 70 - 66). Even though the scores are still fair within the scope of each issue, I feel that this decline makes comparisons with back-issue scores difficult. Secondly I would like to comment on the reviews with the low scores (<50%). I honestly do not think that these games are worthy of a half page review in NAG. I realize that you are warning potential buyers, but this could also be achieved with a mark and a few sentences (especially with your talent for sarcasm). A simple "stay away" would do since I think that most readers trust NAG to distinguish between 90% games and 44% games...

The scary part is that you included an Excel spread sheet with a little graph to illustrate your point. Try not to examine NAG too closely or you'll uncover all the flaws. In addition you cannot compare games released in recent issues with games released too far back because so much changes so quickly in this industry that comparing Halo on the PC and Half-Life 2 is really the same as trying to compare apples and pears as it were. If you think our thinking is flawed on this count let us know and send us a mail. NAG Ed.

FROM Tiza

SUBJECT Ratings

I was looking through my drawer when I saw an old NAG. It was the June 2003 issue so I picked it up and read some of the reviews. I noticed that 2 PC games you reviewed got in the 90's and another 2 got in the high 80's. I then read your September 2004 issue and noticed only one game got in the 90's and only 1 in the 80's. There was also a game that got under 60 and one game even got 34. I am just wondering if the games have been getting worse or if the NAG ratings have gotten tougher?

The games are getting worse and we're getting tougher. We're just tired of seeing the same old ideas and game dynamics being used over and over. Call us jaded, call us washed-up but never call us easy to please. NAG Ed.

FROM Christopher

SUBJECT Letter

This is my first letter I will be sending to NAG. I would just like to say this is the best PC magazine that I have ever read. I would like to know 2 things.

1. Why did PC Gaming change to NAG (New Age Gaming)?
 2. Is Quake IV's graphics going to be better than DOOM 3's graphics?
- Oh yes, can I ask you one more thing? Can I maybe send you a CS movie on CD that I made so you can say if it sucks or not? Should I thought you said 2 things? Ed I tell you where I live?
1. We changed it to NAG because New Age Gaming seemed a little clumsy - we're still not sure if this was a good idea or not. What is/was PC Gaming anyway?
 2. Quake IV uses the DOOM 3 engine but will feature some enhancements - so yes, Quake IV will look better than DOOM 3. Please don't tell me you judge games based on what they look like!
 3. We're so tired of CS we even hate the letters C and S. In fact, if I could go back in time...
 4. If I have your address I might show up one night

SHORTS

FROM Spanky

SUBJECT Not given

I just wanted to know if NAG can maybe sponsor me. I live in JHB?

No problem - your burglar bars, anti-hijacking kit, vehicle tracking device and an AK-47 are on their way. NAG Ed.

FROM Not sure

SUBJECT Ping

When I play Internet or LAN I always see my computer has ping. What is ping?

Ping is the stuff you find between your keys on your keyboard - if it builds up your computer goes slowly so remember to always wash your hands before using your PC to avoid ping. Go here to find out more: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ping>. NAG Ed.

FROM Simon

SUBJECT Inbox / Forums

In the July issue of NAG there was a bit of the forum in the Inbox section. Although you put that there because it was about the Inbox it would be cool to have more forum topics in the Inbox section or have a whole page to itself. But the topics should be interesting, not arbitrary topics.

Nice idea - we're looking at it as well as a million other rather good ideas - we really need to publish a 240 page magazine to fit everything in. So, if you're pirating NAG i.e. reading this sentence and not spending money on buying your own copy it'll take twice as long to get there. ;) NAG Ed.

wearing my black leather thong and not much else; your dog would probably bark a lot and I've found with these kinds of meetings that the cops usually show up at some point, so no. NAG Ed.

FROM Neil

SUBJECT This was rejected by PC Format

I was wondering whether NAG would be morally bankrupt enough to publish this. My friend seems to think so... "The Letter to PC Format" [snip, Ed].

Look, we laughed at your comments about their design, humour, technical knowledge, artwork, screenshots and sentence structure. We rolled on the floor at your tactless description of their writing style, features, columns, news, cover girls and back page and we also agree that certain members of their Editorial staff do in fact look like those Mediterranean island dwelling lizards but we'd never stoop low enough to actually publish what you sent us - we're overdrawn at the morality bank. Thanks for the laugh though. NAG Ed.

FROM Enforcer

SUBJECT Game Restrictions

While looking in the games department of a certain shop, you happen across a certain game of your liking, curiously you inspect the box for its game requirements, and then you see the age restriction on the bottom corner of the box! An 18 year old age restriction! Even though you are under age, you decide to take the chance, and move to the counter to purchase the item. Sweating and crossing fingers, you hand in the game and the money along with it. But, the cashier ignores the restriction and lets the boy purchase the game. Now, how many times has this type of situation happened? Many times I tell you, and it will probably never stop. I know it might just be that retail agencies are not enforcing these age restrictions, but someone



The 'Letter of the Moment' prize is sponsored by EA Africa

The winner receives 2 games for coming up with the most eclectic chicken scratch

INBOX

should take responsibility. If we can take age restrictions as seriously as we do in movies, kids would have a harder time buying a restricted game. Otherwise, what's the point in putting these restrictions on? I'm not saying that those types of games will induce a sudden case of hysteria and mass murder out of a minor, but that's the same as saying, here, watch an 18 restricted movie. We don't know the effects it can have. So, to be on the safe side, let's watch our youth and stick to the restrictions set, because I'm sure they're there for a good reason.

All too true - there's little point in putting age restrictions on games that are not enforced. That's like letting babies smoke cigars. However, you also have to wonder about all these corrupt kids buying age restricted games in the first place - bad seeds I tell you, they're probably better off doing a little hard time now as preventative maintenance and as a bonus they get used to prison life early on. I guess their parents are doing a sterling job overall. NAG Ed.

FROM ROUGEleader

SUBJECT Age Restrictions

I was looking at the back of my brothers GTA III box, and immediately my eye was drawn to the large "18 only" sticker, I then realized that you could still be in diapers and the cashier wouldn't blink an eye at selling you Manhunt. I think the solution to this problem is not to have a variety of age brackets into which games are classified but simply 2 categories - below 18 and above 18 years of age. Computer stockists should then be made aware of whom they can sell to - just like alcohol - you can't sell Smirnoff to a minor! Another thing, if you can't tell the difference between fictional violence and reality you probably shouldn't be running over hookers in a jeep in the first place. Unfortunately this raises yet another point, games are becoming more realistic by the day, and therefore the thin line that separates reality from fiction is becoming redundant or even non-existent. This brings me back to the point that games should be regulated, because we never know what tiny imprint seeing something we shouldn't makes upon our minds in future.

Not a bad idea... but it's never that simple - imagine having to wait until you're 18 to play Far Cry because of a little blood here and there. There's a big difference between Manhunt and Far Cry and broadening the age restriction bracket in the way you've described would choke the industry - a little ironic in a way. I say if a retailer is caught selling an age restricted game to a minor that retailer should be liable for a stiff fine [let's say R20 000 for example]. If a law like that was passed shops would definitely pay attention to these small but important things. NAG Ed.

FROM David

SUBJECT Marriage and gaming

I found a solution to the problem of finding time for games while married. I am engaged to be married, and already I have my girl hooked to computers! Here's how I did it. First, I let her see me playing a good old classic, namely Diablo 2. Then, I offered to take my computer from my dorm room to a place she could play for a day. But one day wasn't enough! Now every chance she gets, I take my computer, set it up for her, and she plays for five days straight! So there is hope for gaming after marriage! Thanks for a great magazine. Oh, and what's with the Malaysian price on the cover? Do you really export or is it just to look good?

Well done, I see your future wife's training is complete, good luck on the marriage thing - if all goes well you could even start having cybersex together.

NAG Magazine is actually sold in Malaysia and Singapore - can a reader that side of the world please take a picture of something and send it to me? NAG Ed.

FROM Not given

SUBJECT Emulators

I've got a question to ask.

Are emulators e.g. PS2, GBA, N64 etc, legal?

Because they're all over the internet.

Strictly speaking no. If you can write a piece of software that emulates another platform it's not technically illegal but as soon as you start duplicating the other platforms code it becomes illegal - this is a very general summary. Some of the older platforms like the Commodore 64 etc. have excellent emulators and even a few games that the original developers have made freely available to download. It's tricky territory so use a sapper. NAG Ed.

FROM Some Hillybilly

SUBJECT Just checking

[Note: this letter has been left as it was received - our decoding machine is in the shop, Ed]

So where you all get the gall to say that your magazine is "South Africa's leading technology & computer gaming magazine"? Ha, I laugh in your face! Surely not... however that them glossy cover.... that thick magazine full of info, the price... what can I say about that them price... and a CD full of demos... (Drooling sound). Okay, okay, so I reckon then I'm a redneck inbred hillbilly from the backwaters of Alabama. My mistake! So you magazine is the leading one in S.A. Informative, pretty pictures here and there that my sister Mary-Becky-Sue can cut up. Insane gadgets for my pappy to stare at. My brother Ralph and my other brother Ralph like them previews you all have.

Dangnabit...now I'm gonna have to subscribe. More squirrel hunting for me if I need to raise the cash! **Dear advertisers, please note that this is not an example of the 'standard issue' NAG reader. Yes we have a few hillbillies and slower than normal people reading NAG but you know how it goes - cast a big net and you're bound to catch a few boots. NAG Ed.**

FROM Brett

SUBJECT TLC

My one buddy told me that giving your PC TLC improves its performance drastically - is this true? Yes, James [our Features Editor] is living testament to this phenomenon. He continually creates a black cloud of unhappiness when he's in front of his PC and bizarrely he's the one with all the 'technical' problems - like broken keyboard legs, dented cases, crashed hard drives and a motherboard that mocks him continually with quirky never-before-seen-and-never-repeated errors and problems. Like they say, put negative energy out and that's what you get back in. Conversely because he's like this when things go bad for him the other NAG staff find it amusing which only makes him madder - see the nasty merry-go-round he's on? Be nice to your PC and it'll be nice to you. NAG Ed.

FROM Michael

SUBJECT Macintosh and mice?

USB technology was originally developed by Macintosh and has since been implemented into all PCs, to do this it had to be made a standard technology (i.e. USB 1.0 is the same speed on Mac's as it is on PC's and the same for USB 2.0). The problem with using a mouse with two or more buttons on a Macintosh is in the Apple OS software (obviously software developed to work better with only one mouse button) and not the connection itself. For the users, gamers and developers who wish to

use a non-apple mouse, Macintoshes do have a mouse setup where you can setup your multi-button mouse as you would in Windows (in Mac OS X, command button (to bring up apple start menu), Settings (I think), System Preferences, Mouse setup). For those people who want to play games (Command & Conquer comes to mind) with the standard single button mouse there is also a way to do it: On any Macintosh keyboard is a command button (similar to the Windows button on most new keyboards) which will change the click of your mouse when pressed in combination with the mouse click. (The same goes for the CTRL (control) button and ALT (option) button when pressed in combination with the mouse click). But if you are a serious gamer you will not be using an Apple Macintosh as they are more expensive, more difficult to upgrade, and not the ideal machine setup for gaming; and although some new games will be released with Macintosh support not all games do. But if you are a regular Mac user (Graphic designers and such) then you already know this... Don't you? Below is a link to Apple Macintosh firmware update for wireless keyboard and mouse users (should improve performance). www.apple.com/support/downloads/wirelesskeyboardmousefirmwareupdate.html **I was only joking you know, but thanks for the information - I'm sure someone somewhere out there will find it useful if only as a warning. NAG Ed.**

FROM Pieter

SUBJECT Help me out please!

I am a frequent reader of NAG and was hoping to once again start surfing the forums on your homepage - except my tyrannical organisation (okay, "strict") has decided to start blocking your site due to the fact that it contains "computer games". To my knowledge there are no playable games on the NAG website... am I mistaken? [Yes, Ed] I have never noticed and I can't even go now and have a look see. I wrote a motivation which was rejected and that really sucks! I am not browsing porn or playing games but arming myself with knowledge from a world-class site. Any suggestions?

Perhaps you can find new ways to motivate them... I don't know - tell your boss you'll let everyone know you found pictures of Yugoslavian midget porn on his computer if he doesn't let you visit NAG. Why do people think we can solve all their problems? NAG Ed.

FROM Ruan

SUBJECT Linear games

I was wondering why game developers expect gamers to walk down an enclosed path also known as a linear play environment. I enjoy playing games where I determine my own fate, not one where my fate has already been determined before I even installed the game. One game I love is Morrowind - it truly is an excellent game, the open world full of choice. Maybe most gamers enjoy playing games like sheep that are following the leader. The game runs through a basic story line that unfolds as you play along. Why don't they give you more choice? Is it too difficult to create non-linear games? **It's just a limitation that needs to be there or all games would take 10 years to develop and come on 20 DVDs. You need to limit certain aspects of a game to make it playable and ultimately financially viable. NAG Ed.**

Screw work, rather waste time here:

www.nag.co.za

Previews

NAG's Wanted List



Okami

PS2, GCN
2005

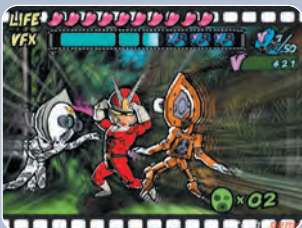
From the people who brought you Viewtiful Joe, Team Clover, comes Okami, a game that we would call a Japanese-themed, Zelda-esque adventure in which you play a wolf. The details are sketchy, but it looks really impressive, sporting unique water-coloured visuals.



GTA: San Andreas

PC
2005

It's a bit unfair that the series that started on the PC now gets a serious Console bias, but that's the way the cookie crumbles. Besides, he who laughs last - everyone knows (or should be told) that GTA is infinitely more fun on the PC.



Viewtiful Joe 2

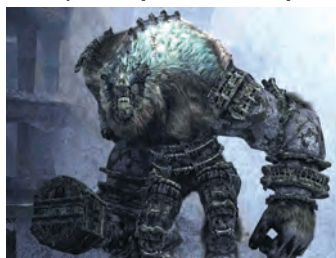
PS2, GCN
Q1 2005

It's a Clover Studio double bill this week, since we also want Viewtiful Joe 2. Even the recent, unexplained removal of co-op support in the game hasn't really dented our anticipation, though it does leave a bit of a bitter taste in your mouth...

Thanks to its delay we can bring you the impressive, black-ops filled details behind Splinter Cell 3, which really impressed us as well as an exclusive look at Dungeon Siege II. The DOOM 3 expansion also makes an appearance, independent developer Introversion show off Darwinia and the curious Contents Under Pressure shows how urban culture is influencing games. Finally, dig into the new horror title Haunting Ground and share our scepticism as the Commandos series goes FPS in Strike force.

Wanda and the Colossus

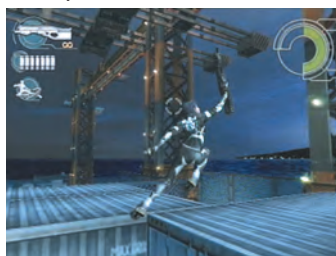
Developer **Sony** Publisher **Sony** Platform **PS2** Release Date **2005**



Remember Ico? Probably not - one of the best PlayStation 2 games out there is sadly also one of the most under-rated. Still, you can't keep a good thing down and a non-sequel comes in the form of Wanda and the Colossus or Ico 2 or Nico - no official name as yet. In fact, all we have is this screen grab from the video, but the game looks really impressive. There's not a lot even to be said for the story, but you've got reason enough to be excited. Take our word for it.

Ghost in the Shell: Stand Alone Complex

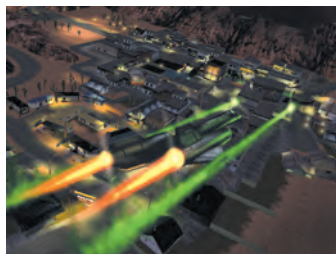
Developer **Cavia** Publisher **Bandai** Platform **PS2** Release Date **Q1 2005**



Take up a role as "Major" Motoko Kusanagi, Batou or Tachikoma in the game, which is being released on the hype of Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence, as you complete the 12 plus stages. Hacking and controlling units from afar, as well as four-player, are all features in a series that has thus far only produced some really drab game. With 20 minutes of FMV sequences, it's bound to keep fans happy. The rest of us will wait and see if it's really worth the wait.

Origin of the Species

Developer **Nu Generation Games** Publisher **Tri Synergy** Platform **PC** Release Date **TBA**



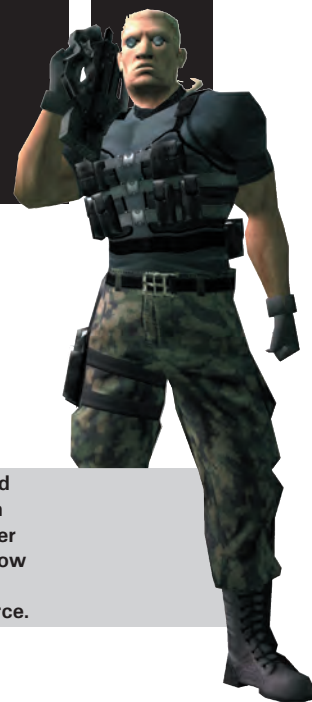
Not based on Darwin's book, instead Origin of the Species looks to be an interesting mixture between RPG and more approachable gameplay. You are a teenage girl out to save her friends and stop a legion of enormous insects after a government experiment to mutate and enlarge the creatures goes predictably awry. It appears to be a mixture of action and RPG, so we might start thinking 'Sacred' or 'Diablo' more than, say, 'Neverwinter Nights'.

Hello Kitty's London Adventure

Developer **THQ** Publisher **THQ** Platform **Mobile** Release Date **Q4 2004**



Here's one for all the fans of that cute kitten that adorns arguably more merchandise than Garfield. It might surface here soon: Hello Kitty goes to visit her friend Tippy and on the way she has to navigate London's parks, solving puzzles and picking flowers. Sounds cutesy to us and it certainly is colourful (isn't London more dreary than green?) but it looks like the kind of game you could use to kill hours with on your mobile phone. There's also a rope-skip game, but trawling the park sounds like a far better idea...



A LEGEND RETURNS

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dungeon crawling

Dungeon Siege and the expansion were both criticized for being too linear. Are there plans to create more sub quests in the sequel?

Well, one of the things fans wanted was a bit of a deeper RPG experience, so we definitely wanted to offer an improvement in this respect. The story is primarily linear, because that's how you'd usually tell a story, but we've added a lot more optional quests - we've got about forty optional quests that players can play in the game. The towns are much bigger than they were in Dungeon Siege and they serve as hubs, so you'll return to them multiple times over the course of the game. So players should feel that they have a lot more options in where they can go and what they can do, even though the story you follow is pretty straight.

Fans have a big influence on sequels. How much did you rely on community feedback and how much of DS2 is part of the intended vision for the game?

We had a very small team here to help out with Maddoc and Legends of Aranna. We had a skeleton crew that helped out with the design, balancing and levels. But when it comes to DS2 we had our ideas from the first game such as things we couldn't get in and that we wanted to see - that is what drove most of it. But we also took a lot of time reading the fan feedback, seeing what people were saying about the game - what they liked and didn't like - and it turns out that most of the things that the fans wanted to see were exactly the things we wanted to do.

So it's fair to say the team members are big fans of the game itself?

Definitely!

In the first game we went through all of the RPG regions - snow, desert, jungles and forests. What new areas can we expect in DS2?

There will be some new areas. The towns will be a lot bigger, a lot more detailed and very themed to the story. We've got bamboo, jungle, an enchanted forest. There's a corrupted



Shattered Legionnaire VI.

10.7.03 Skinn



Dungeon Siege was a flawed classic. On the one hand it broke new ground for action RPGs and sported a lush and large game world as well as a creative way to create character classes. On the other it was very linear and offered little other than to get to the end and pummel whoever started the mess you're involved in. So the sequel gives Gas Powered Games a great opportunity to right the wrongs and continue the legacy of one of the past few years' most impressive games, but what do they have in mind? We spoke to Kevin Lambert, Lead designer on *Dungeon Siege II*, on just that topic...

forest, an enemy city and new indoor regions.

Will players go back to any of the regions in the first games?

The game takes places on the continent of Aranna; DS1 took place in the province of Ebb and Legends of Aranna took place on an island off the coast of Aranna, so this takes place in a completely new area.

Tell us more about Coach AI. Why would it succeed where many AI programs have failed?

Well, the Coach AI allows us flexibility and it puts power in the hands of the level designers, scripters and designers. The way I like to describe it is like a football coach's play book. The Coach AI doesn't physically sit in the world; it's more like a manager sitting in the background, telling monsters what to do. So each monster can have things that it's doing, how it reacts to other monsters and other stimuli in the area. You can also set up plays. For example a hide-and-flank play would be where whenever a monster sees the player, it will run and hide in the bushes and wait for the player to run past. When this happens the monsters will jump out and try and flank the player from the sides. We have quite a few plays that we can make. There's

a lot of power in the system.

One of the series' charms has been that you need not choose a character class but instead evolve your player as you progress in the game. How are you guys expanding on this system without boxing the player with RPG stereotypes?

We love the idea that you are what you do and you don't ever have to start a character and be locked in that class for the rest of the game. We're definitely bringing that forward to *Dungeon Siege 2*. The way that we're expanding that is instead of making new character classes, we're giving each of the four character classes more depth. Fans of the original game will instantly recognize the four classes (melee, ranged, combat magic and nature magic), but we've added a lot of depth in the way, mostly, of skill trees and powers for those four classes. Those give you more choices as you are bringing up your character. So if you have a fighter and I have a fighter, based on our choices we could have totally different fighters that play different ways by the time you get to high levels.

How many variations can players expect?

Well, there are four classes and each class has two or three pretty distinct skill progres-

sions. When you take that to a party level the options are even more, so there's a lot of room for players to experiment with.

DS2 will feature all-new powers and abilities. Can you expand on some of those?

We wanted the powers to be really impressive and the reasons why we came up with powers is because the number one thing that fans were saying they really wanted to see in the sequel is better combat – something that keeps you more engaged. We were criticized a little bit in DS1 for the game playing itself at times; players felt there wasn't as much to sink their teeth into – they could sit back, click in an area and the party would clean it all up and kill all the monsters, so all the player did was manage the health potions. So we really wanted to try hard and focus on combat that will be more engaging. The powers were our big answer to that. They are these really big and impressive abilities that party members can do. The powers have skill requirements, so depending on the skills you choose, it opens up different powers for your characters. You use these powers in battle, but you want to choose the right time because powers need to recharge as you play, so you might fire one when the monsters are all close together in an area. You can also



come up with neat combinations of power. For instance, we have a power called gravity stone that creates this big, crystal stone in the middle of the environment where you click which the monsters are attracted to, similar to a magnet, and while they are standing there you can have another character, like a combat mage, fire off a giant devastation power that causes a huge explosion.

Tales of Aranna introduced some great interface changes and additions. Will these appear in DS2 and what additional changes were made to the HUD and interface elements?

We've taken a lot of the features that we felt were good in Legends of Aranna, like Attack Nearest and the potion sharing, and we added new elements which helps make the interface more natural and takes away some of the monotony. One of the things from DS1 that annoyed me personally was whenever I got to a new town and I had tons and tons of inventory that I'd collected. Selling it and figuring out which was the best stuff to have took a lot of time. So what we've done, just to make things a little easier, is whenever you pick up an item it compares it to the item you currently have equipped and we'll show you up and down arrows on which item is better and worse – and by how much. So if you have a sword that does 12 damage and you pick up a sword that does 14-16 damage, it will show an up arrow with the stats and you'll know that it's a better weapon than the one you've got. The point is to focus more on the things that are fun and that is getting the cool items and playing with them.

Are you using a new engine?

No. We've made a lot of improvements and optimizations to the DS1 engine. Some of the systems have been completely redone. The effects engine has been totally rewritten, we have a new scripting system that allows level designers to create interactive and non-interactive cut-scenes within the game, and there are tons of optimizations with the multiplayer and graphics engine. But it wasn't a

full rewrite from scratch.

Dungeon Siege didn't boast a highly interactive environment. Are you sticking to this approach or will the world feature more distractions?

We have. We've taken some steps to make the world a little bit more interactive. Once again fans were asking for a little bit more depth, so we wanted to bring along something more than just combat and killing monsters all the time. So we've added some world interactivity. One example is breaking a cage, picking up some wood, lighting it with fire and burning down a tower. There are small interactive obstacles, but I wouldn't call them puzzles – that's not what the game is about.

Apparently player choices can affect the world environment. Can you tell us more about that?

The player actions can affect the world environments. For example there's a town you'll come to in the game that's in distress – they were just attacked by an evil mage and the town is on fire. You can't get to certain areas in the town – the bridge has been broken and it needs to be repaired – so you help put out the fire and then help the architect rebuild the bridge, which leads to new areas. So there are certain scenarios like that with a lot more interactivity which affects the world environment.

Judging by the screen shots, Dungeon Siege 2 doesn't seem to be taking leaps and bounds in the graphic department. Is this a misimpression?

I think the reason why it might be tough to see a difference is because DS1 was already so lush that even though we've increased the texture resolution and doubled the polygon count on the terrain, it could be hard to see just because DS1 was already so far above the competition with how lush it was. But our textures are larger – all the weapons and items have their own individual textures; our polygon count has doubled, even on the monsters. We're using Shader 2.0, which





obviously doesn't come across on a screen-shot; we've added a lot of pre-rendered movies and interactive cut-scenes. So we've made a lot of improvements, but they are subtle. It's not night and day, because the world was already so graphical. We didn't want to add so many polygons to the game that it started to run slow, we wanted to keep it accessible on a good minimum spec machine. So we focused on what would bring more richness to the environment.

Tell us a bit more about your party. Will they feature more depth and perhaps even their own sub stories?

Definitely! Going with what the fans wanted most: the other big thing that people were asking for was a deeper story and more compelling characters. So we worked really hard on that front. Each of the hireable characters, rather than just being the people that you meet in a bar that you hire and then not hear much from afterwards, have their own background, personality, story and relationships with all the other characters. Depending on your party composition they'll talk to each other along the way, they'll comment on things, you get to learn who the characters are and what they like and dislike. You'll feel closer to your characters because of that. They also each have their own personal agenda, which is a side quest, and you have to listen to them and they'll give clues to it as you're playing and when the opportunity arises you can open their personal quest if it arises.

We have eight party members to choose from. You'll have six slots for a party, depending on how you play the game. In DS1 the first character you meet you hired and the second one you hired, so there wasn't a lot of difference in party composition until you got really far. So we wanted to make sure that in DS2 you met a few people and you chose who to hire rather than everyone having the same party members as they play through the game.

Dungeon Siege boasted an additional multiplayer world to play in. Are you

planning something similar for the sequel and are there plans to inject more replay value into Dungeon Siege 2?

We wanted to focus our resources on the co-operative multiplayer experience in the game, so what we've done is take the single player component and made sure that people could play through the story together with friends. So we're using the same environment – we didn't make a whole new world. The problem with Dungeon Siege was that you had to play through it all in one sitting if you wanted to save your progress. DS2 will allow people to pick up where they left off in multiplayer.

Will the sequel feature a musical score rivalling the first?

Definitely. We have Jeremy Sole, who is an extremely talented musician, working with us again on Dungeon Siege 2.

DS2 features more elaborate boss characters. What's so different about them?

In the first games the bosses were really big, scaled-up characters with a lot of hit points, so we wanted the boss characters to be something special, involving different play tactics. You can't just stand in one place and use your heal potions; you actually have to figure out the best way to attack the bosses. For example our first boss is a giant three-headed snake monster and each head does something different. The left and the right heads attack the player with big areas of damage while the centre head will actually heal the other two heads. So you might want to attack the centre head or overpower it before it heals the rest of the body. You'll have to move your party around in these fights, sometimes even interact with the environment to beat them. There's a lot more versatility to it.

Thank you and good luck!

Great, thanks! 

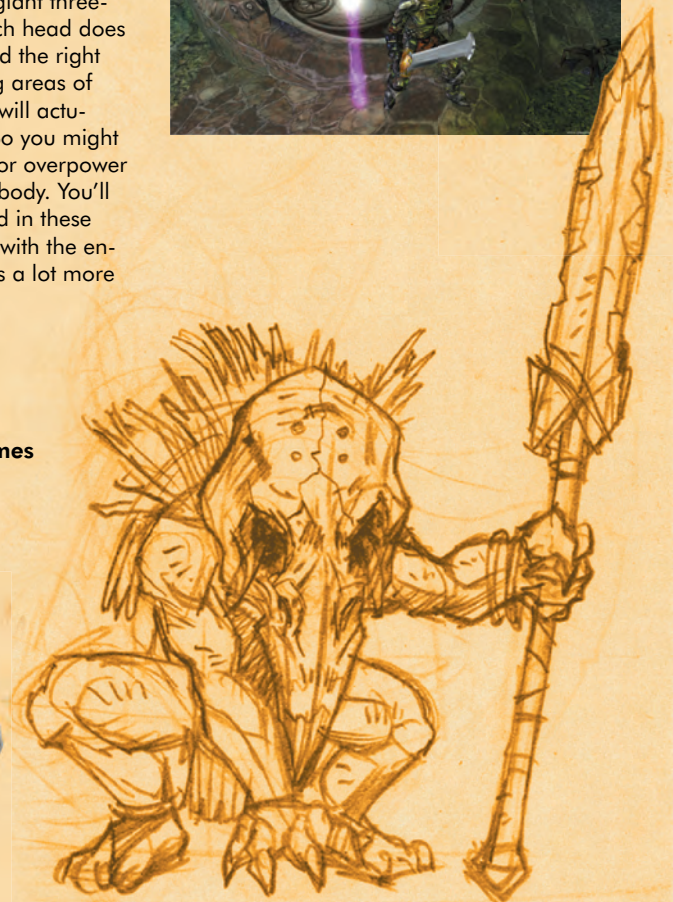
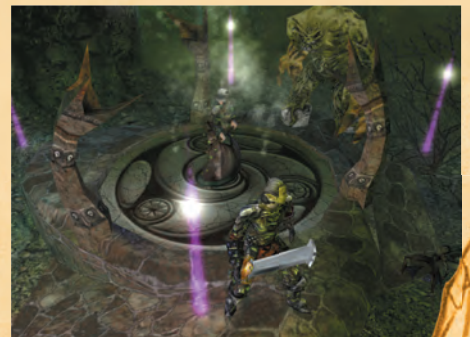
Developer: **Gas Powered Games**


Publisher: **Microsoft**

Format: **PC**

Release date: **Q2 2005**

www.dungeonsiege.com





Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned – that would be a lot of fury, because by the looks of it Hell is pissed off and ready to take some names, so it has fury in spades. After a certain marine stopped their invasion, it's inevitable that the denizens of the underworld would want some revenge. It's also inevitable that after DOOM 3's success fans can expect an expansion, taking us even further into the realms of evil. So what's it all about this time? And what's new? Matt Hooper from id Software and Brandon James from Nerve Software answered a few questions about the DOOM 3 Expansion Resurrection of Evil.

Resurrection of Evil

Q: How does Resurrection of Evil tie in with DOOM 3?

Matt Hooper: DOOM 3 finishes in an epic battle with the Cyberdemon at the Hell Hole – a manifestation of Hell on Mars. After defeating the Cyberdemon, the Soul Cube closes the Hell Hole and you are rescued on Nov. 20th, 2145 by Rescue Team Echo One. The UAC complex is completely destroyed and only one survivor remains; the marine that you play throughout DOOM 3.

In early January of 2146, the UAC holds a news conference and reports their research post on Mars was destroyed by a reactor malfunction and that no one has survived. Not more than 5 months later, a UAC orbital probe receives a faint, unidentified signal originating from the Site 1 location on Mars. Site 1 was the location for the very first UAC expedition to Mars but was thought to be a dead site until the new signal was received. Earth bound researchers are not able to decode the strange signal or determine what type of device is transmitting it. Some researchers speculate that the signal is a beacon of some kind.

In August of 2146 UAC scientist Dr. Elizabeth McNeil is sent to Mars to re-open the Erebus complex and lead a team of archeologists and scientists in discovering what is emitting the strange signal. Dr. McNeil is chosen to return because she was the former lead archeologist and is the leading expert on the ancient Martian civilization. Some UAC executives do not feel comfortable sending her to Mars since she worked so closely with Betruger.

This is where we pick up the story in DOOM

3: Resurrection of Evil. It's important to note that you do not continue the role of the marine from DOOM 3. In D3:RoE you are a combat engineer in a large security detachment sent to the Erebus complex to both protect and keep an eye on Dr. McNeil. In less than a month after your arrival, the Erebus complex is brought partially on-line and work begins on excavating Site 1. Nearly 6 months pass and in March, 2147, the Site 1 chamber is opened and source of the signal, a mysterious Evil Artifact, is discovered.

Led this time by Dr. Betruger, who is now fully demonized, Hell is unleashed once again to hunt down and recover the Evil Artifact, which you now possess.

Q: Please tell us about the main characters.

Matt Hooper: The player assumes the role of a combat engineer sent to the Erebus complex as part of a security and research detachment with Dr. Elizabeth McNeil. Dr. McNeil, the foremost expert on the Ancient Civilization discovered on Mars, was sent by the UAC to locate the source of the strange signal picked up by their satellites. Elizabeth played an important, but not well publicized, role in the original DOOM 3 story. She alerted the UAC board of directors to Betruger's activities, which eventually lead to Swann and Campbell being sent to Mars.

Q: What are some of the locations we can expect?

Matt Hooper: One area id and Nerve really wanted to bring the player back to is the ►





Ancient Civilization. This area is one of the more visually striking and unexplored areas in DOOM 3 and we chose to start Resurrection of Evil in these Ruins. From the ancient ruins you make your way up through Site 1. From there you go through the Phobos Labs. Connected by Sky Trams, these labs offer research support for Site 1 and are also the location where the player meets up with Dr. McNeil. The player eventually reaches Hell to face off with the demonized Betruger.

Q: Are there any new updates to the DOOM 3 physics engine that gamers will see?

Matt Hooper: The DOOM 3 physics engine is one of the most advanced proprietary physics engines in gaming, so it wasn't so much a question of what we needed to add to it, but how we could use it in new ways. One of these new ways is through the use of one of the UAC's new inventions, the IPL (Ionized Plasma Levitator) or as the Site 1 workers call it, the Grabber. The player is able to manipulate items ranging from a coke can to a toxic barrel. These can be used as projectile weapons or for stacking to reach high places. It's also able to harness and fire back enemy fire balls and very small enemies.

Q: What can you tell us about any new demons and weapons in RoE?

Matt Hooper: One of the most exciting additions to Resurrection of Evil is the Double Barrel Shotgun. Not since DOOM II has there been such a satisfying weapon. This one of a kind weapon is discovered in Sarge's old Site 1 office, as a trophy on his wall. As mentioned in the above physics question, the new IPL or "Grabber" tool is a useful weapon, as almost anything can become a projectile, including exploding barrels. The Grabber can also turn the tables on monsters that shoot fireballs and other projectiles. You can grab those projectiles and launch them back as weapons.



At the beginning of the game you recover the Evil Artifact and you carry it all the way to hell. Betruger sends three specialized Demons out to track down and destroy you and recover the Artifact. These three "Hunters" must be battled one by one and each time the Evil Artifact gains the ability of the Hunter it destroys. Through the Artifact, you first gain the power of "Helltime" - the slowing down of time for everything except the player. You are able to move and run normally, but everything in the world greatly slows down for a short period of time then eases back to normal time. The other two powers are revealed through the destruction of the respective Hunters.

There are several other new demons that Betruger dispatches in this invasion: The Vulgar is a very quick and agile demon often seen crawling and leaping or attacking from long distances with fireballs. You have to be on your toes fighting this creature because of its tremendous speed and elusive behaviour. The Bruiser is a massive demon with two giant cannons for arms. A mix of technology and hell, this powerful demon is best dispatched using "Helltime." Much like the Lost Soul from DOOM 3, the Forgotten is a flaming flying skull that attacks with extreme speed and manoeuvrability. Throughout the game, you'll also battle each of the 3 demon Hunters. These massive beasts require a delicate mix of tactics and firepower. The Evil Artifact gains the incredible power of each Hunter when it is defeated.

Q: Is there any multiplayer information that you can share with us?

Brandon James: The multiplayer offerings

of DOOM 3 are being expanded with the addition of new power-ups, such as Haste and Invulnerability, new hellish locations and the ability to pulverize your opponents with the powerful new double barrelled shotgun, all in several new maps designed internally at id Software.

We've also added official support for up to eight players in all of the available gameplay modes, and we'll have a couple of other surprises for fans of DOOM 3 multiplayer.

Q: How closely is id Software working on the title with Nerve?

Matt Hooper: id Software works extremely closely with Nerve on D3:RoE. The two groups, having worked together on previous projects, have had a great working relationship already established and this has given us a head start with this title. **N**

Developer: **Nerve Software**

Publisher: **Activision**

Supplier: **MegaRom [011] 234 2680**

Format: **PC**

Release date: **Q1 2005**

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A dramatic, low-key photograph of Sam Fisher, the protagonist of Splinter Cell. He is shown from the chest up, wearing his signature black tactical gear. His eyes are illuminated by the glowing green lenses of his Night Vision Goggles. He holds a combat knife in his right hand, which is also lit up by the green light. The background is a dark, rainy night, with rain streaks visible across the frame. A bright light source behind him creates a strong rim light and lens flare effects.

Silent Hunter

The world's most famous and most silent black ops agent returns in what's likely to be his best game yet...

There was a lot to get excited about earlier this year at E3, but the one title we first dismissed as “just another sequel” quickly shattered our jaded perceptions when Ubisoft showed off Splinter Cell 3, transforming it from a rehash to possibly the most impressive game on the floor. But this is, after all, the game that even Metal Gear Solid creator Hideo Kojima said he’d like to make. Despite serious competition from the likes of Kojima-san’s famed series, Splinter Cell not only carved a niche for itself – it became one of the most influential titles in the Stealth genre, spawning a worthy sequel and two solid platform games – not bad for a title that saw the light in 2002.

Now the Unreal-powered game is back; back in the hands of Ubisoft Montreal, the series creators. But how much further can you really take a game that’s still doing the same thing with the same character using the same engine for the third time? Quite a lot, actually. If the real-time demonstration from E3 is anything to go by, Splinter Cell 3: Chaos Theory is bound to be the most impressive in the series yet, not to mention one of the must-haves of 2005.

But what’s really new? And why would we so gladly throw praise on a game we haven’t even played yet? Well, it’s a matter of mathematics: the Splinter Cell series has yet to disappoint. Some might not have liked the second game, but this turned out to be more a matter of taste than critical dismay. With the enhancements in the second sequel, both graphically (which is jaw-dropping, by the way) and in Sam’s additional repertoire of combat moves and actions – including the ability to use a knife and kick open doors – it all sums up to a pretty impressive step forward. But taking a break from the series after the first title probably gave the Montreal team a lot to think about...

We sat down with Mathieu Ferland, Producer of Splinter Cell and Splinter Cell 3, and spoke about what’s been done, what they are doing and why this could be the best game in the series.



Is the team still surprised when looking back on the last release that there are still areas to improve on?

Looking at the first Splinter Cell, Pandora Tomorrow, or any other games for that matter, there is always room for improvement – even if they are great games!

Many factors will influence the final game, whether it is because of time constraints or technology limitations. In our case, we’ve been developing new technology that will allow us to improve on many areas of

the game and revolutionize the series. We’ve also been listening to what the community had to say, general feedback from gamers, etc. It truly influenced the designers in their approach. A good example would be the addition of the Knife in the game. We’ve done great research and received a lot of feedback about players wanting a knife in the game. However, we can’t just put one in the game for the sake of it. (A smile appeared on Mathieu face!) We needed to evaluate how it would affect the gameplay, what actions could Sam do with it, how close he could get to the enemy to use it, and so on. It basically opened up a lot of opportunities for improving the series.

What would you say is the most important focus for Splinter Cell 3 and will new moves and more interactive ideas be high on the list? To add, do game ideas and ideologies go through a long process?

SC3 is focussing a lot on proximity. I feel that the best feeling a player can get is when he’s in a position, very close to the danger, but in full control of the situation. In the first two Splinter Cell games, the split jump was a nice visual representation of this feeling. In SC3, players are rewarded if they can get closer and closer. They’ll experiment close stealth actions, and get more accurate hints about

Slicing and dicing made cool



One of Sam Fisher's newfound abilities is to cut through soft objects using his knife, itself a new addition to the armoury. Here you can see how Sam cuts through a curtain to reach an opponent.

the mission. They will have new moves available to them, such as the new neck snap move, where Sam is upside down, hanging with his feet and twisting the neck of an enemy below. Incredible! Of course, each idea or move has to be thought through very carefully. It can sometimes be a laborious process because you need to know if it is feasible in terms of technology and animations and if it can be well implemented into the maps. But the final and most important element to ask us is 'Is this idea/move fun for the player?' 'Will he enjoy doing this?' If we're convinced of that, you can be sure it will rank high on our wish list.

We are informed that Sam has new abilities and skills to manipulate the environment around him. Can you give us some details on this please?

Yes, we definitely wanted Sam to interact more with his surroundings... but we also wanted that aspect to be linked with gameplay. Ultimately, this approach will allow the player to go through areas of the game using different methods. A good example of this is the ability for Sam to cut through soft materials in order to move stealthily in an area. Imagine Sam needing to retrieve information inside a tent guarded by two men. You can either confront them, which as you know can be a fatal mistake if you're not extremely careful... or, by going to the side of the tent, you can cut through the material and get inside unnoticed. Each approach can be rewarding for players and brings more depth in terms of gameplay.

Tell us a little about the story and settings to the game. Will the

setting of the year 2008 give lots more latitude?

We put a great deal of thought into our scenarios and situations. Our goal was to emphasize the player's experience and emotions through tension and empowerment. In the game, people get to interact with a mock-up of the real world and that helps them see that even these very big, very frightening, very impersonal events really often come down to very small actions. I wouldn't be able to talk about the scenario without spoiling things a bit; however, we're pretty confident in saying that gamers will love the experience. Setting the game in 2008 certainly gives us more latitude but ultimately, we have a responsibility to create the most believable world that we can. So we certainly don't censor ourselves, but we also need to be sure we aren't being callous or ignorant in any way.

You are using 'rag doll physics' to present even more realism on screen. Can you explain to the readers what rag doll physics is all about?

To put it simply, the Rag Doll Physics engine for our game will imitate real-life physics. If an enemy dies, that enemy will react based on his environment, where he was shot, how he was standing, etc. So basically, you won't see a random animation for deaths because the possibilities with the rag doll physics are endless. The challenge with rag doll in a game like Splinter Cell is incredibly complex because Sam can grab a rag doll and hold it on his shoulders, from any position.

The series has been criticized for its trial-and-error dynamic. Has this been addressed or would it upset the balance of the

Co-op: Killing in double vision



Co-op play is a new addition to multiplayer – two gamers help each other complete levels tailored for two people as they hold onto each other, keep look-out, use ropes and add a variety of other support roles (including holding someone's legs while they hang upside down and using your partner's hanging body as a ladder).

Splinter Cell 3: Chaos Theory Interview

game too much?

Actually, the structure of the game has changed in order to make the game more flexible. Casual gamers will enjoy the game, while hard core gamers will discover hidden paths, mix different game systems or get specific rewards. We tried to remove the trial and error type of gameplay that was too frustrating for many. Now, the game boundaries are wider and the game is forgiving some type of failure to a certain extent. There is always another way around, sometimes more challenging, sometimes more story driven... this new structure is quite a challenge in terms of development, but in the end, it's a great thing because it solves most of the difficulty issues and provides a lot of replay value... and is more fun!

Pandora Tomorrow was developed by Ubisoft Shanghai Studios; what was the reason behind this?

The reasons are quite simple actually. While Ubisoft Shanghai was developing Pandora Tomorrow, the creative team in Montreal was busy preparing the third instalment of the series. The guys at Shanghai were able to start from a good base and created a worthy addition to the series while it gave us the time to improve on many

aspects of the engine and create new standards for the series.

What can we expect now that Sam is back in the capable hands of the Montreal team?

To reach our ambitions, we needed to consider our technology as a whole: AI, animation system, online network, sound engine, development tools and, of course, 3D rendering. These are important elements and we're investing a lot into them in order to produce THE game we've got in mind.

Will you be going for diversity but also keeping the qualities that made SC such a big brand? Please expand on some of the ways you can diversify.

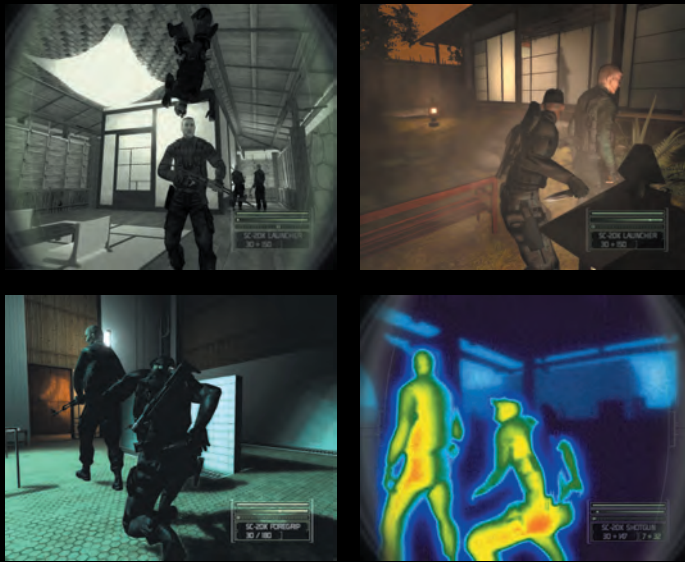
SC3 is proposing many innovations to expand and diversify the series. We felt that gamers deserved more depth, more tension, more freedom and more fun! The game will continue to reward stealth which means we must invest a lot on graphics, level design, AI, dialogue and storyline. This is what makes the game so unique, because you feel that it is more interesting to hide and listen to enemies talking to each other than simply shooting at them. This attention to details will be apparent throughout the game and will bring a more diversified experience.

Can you give us a little teaser to some of the new weapons – even gadgets included?

Sam will still be carrying his reliable SC2000... but with a few cool additions! I can't go too much into specifics, but as shown at E3, the main weapon will allow for many attachments that will upgrade accuracy, power, etc. Each will have its own purpose. The players will also get to use new gadgets and updated ones from previous Splinter Cell games. As stated earlier, we've been listening to what the community had to say and we made choices that will improve Sam's equipment, along with the gameplay experience.

Will there be any new modes of play and can you add anything pertaining to multiplayer?

About multiplayer, you'll find that SC3 online is a more in-depth, co-op experience, including co-op exclusive new moves/actions. This mode is a mission based campaign mode where 2 operatives are working on hot spots, while Sam Fisher is still acting all alone to save the day on critical situations (single player campaign). So, this is quite different from Pandora Tomorrow's adversarial mode experience, but we're very excited about this! **N**



The Evolution of Sam



It's easy to forget how much a game's look can subtly change over a series. Sam might seem similar to his first incarnation back in 2002, but as these character shots from the three respective games show, he's become a lot grittier and human over the past three years.

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Commandos: Strike Force



PC | PS2
XBOX

Developer: Pyro Studios • **Publisher:** Eidos • **Supplier:** Megarom [011] 234 2680 • **Genre:** First Person Shooter
Release Date: Q2 2005


Does the world really need another first person shooter based in World War II? The obvious answer is 'no', so why Pyro decided that the salvation of the Commandos series lies in this mode is beyond us. The latest title in the long-running franchise still involves commanding a squad of fighters, only this time you do it ala Hidden & Dangerous style in first person, plus your squad is limited to three: a Green Beret, sniper and a spy, translating into action, recon and sneak modes. You'll obviously take on Hitler's army as your elite squad go where no soldier has gone before...

At least we'd like to say that, but this has been done long before

Commandos decided to join the fray, not to mention that it's a genre already over-crowded with war-based shooters, no matter how different your approach is. Engine wise we're guessing a heavily modified Quake 3, though it could be the Unreal engine or perhaps proprietary - nothing has been stated in this regard.

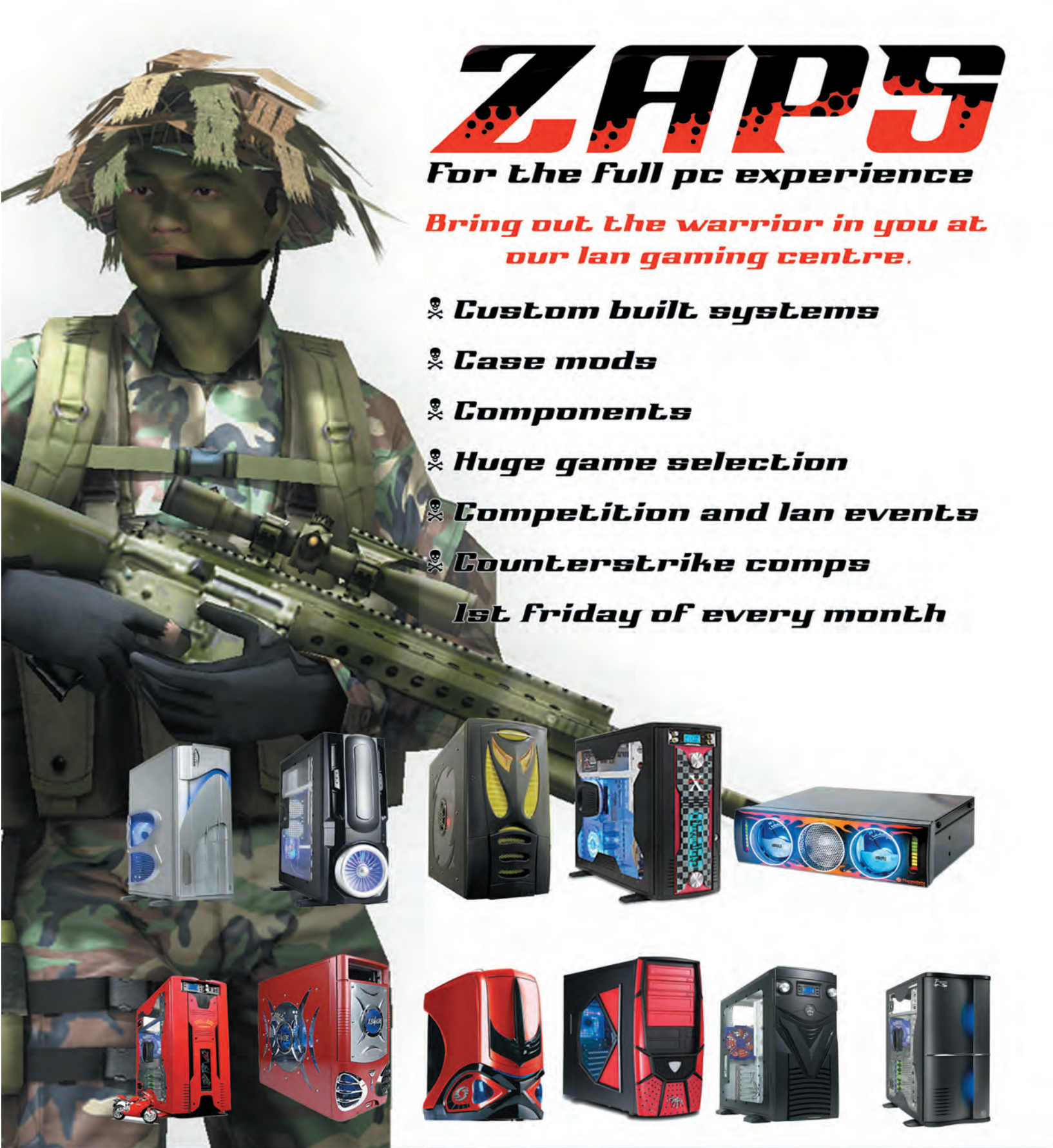
The missions are predictably Commandos fair as you travel all over Europe and Russia, doing things like infiltrate enemy boats and kidnap important generals. Obviously the game's familiar model of using your various units effectively to navigate the map to your final objective would still apply, though we doubt it will take Soldiers: Heroes of World War 2's

open-ended structure. Multiplayer will be a feature with a variety of 'original gameplay modes'.

The biggest question is whether Commandos' restrictive play style, something that started to stagnate the series, will translate well into first person. Adding to that, is it a good idea and the way the series should go? It smacks a bit of a desperate step for the series and not one we're quite keen on seeing, but time will tell if it will be worth it, especially with Pyro claiming it will be a more cerebral experience. Still, honestly, how much more of World War II do we still need to see? At least fans of the genre might be kept happy with a rumoured Desperadoes sequel. 



"Achtung, chaps... those limeys could be anywhere... and nothing is as devoid of honour as being the victim of a bad spin-off!"



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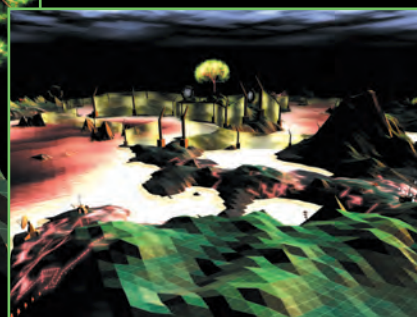
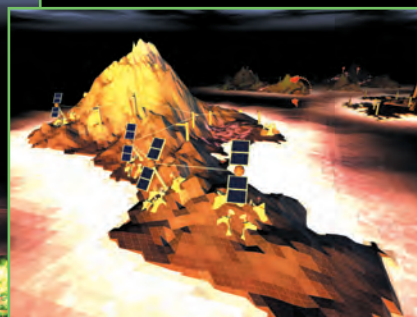
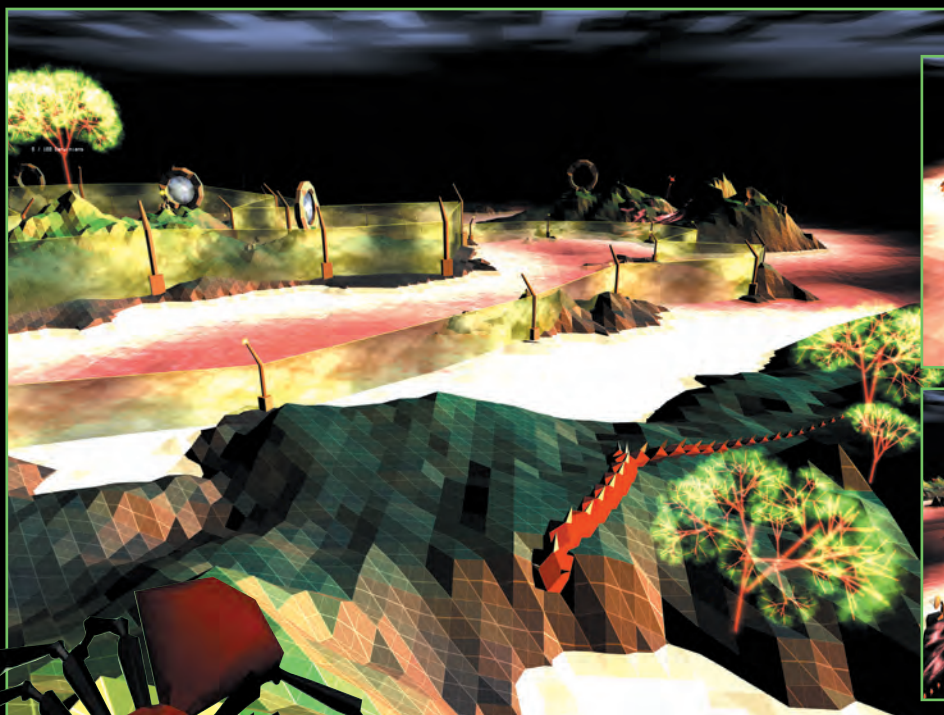
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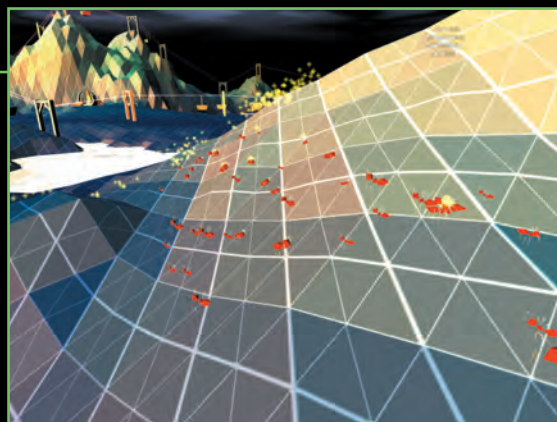
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survival of

Independent game developer Introversion follow up on their successful title Uplink with a new game that sees you playing god - inside retro gaming machines. Another gimmicky take on a familiar genre? At first glance, maybe, but the philosophy behind Darwinia could make it a unique experience and a welcome slew of fresh ideas for players...



"Commercial success is an important factor for Introversion, but it's not our primary aim. We are very clear on this - the design of our games is the primary focus, and everything else is secondary."

Chris Delay, Lead Developer at Introversion Games, might seem to be echoing concepts and ideas a lot of developers like to proclaim, but in the case of the small-scale British developer it can put its money where its mouth is. Delay and fellow Introversion members Mark Morris and Thomas Arundel met each other at university and started the company after finishing their education. Soon they released Uplink, a hacker simulator that was distributed online and thanks to word-of-mouth, eventual distribution in retail chains and the occasional instance of Guerrilla marketing (such as promoting the game on forums anonymously) quickly became a cult hit - netting enough cash for their next big project, Darwinia.

What started as a three month project has bloomed into a multi-year one, becoming more ambitious than their first title and prompting the original three-man team to expand to six, still extremely small by development standards. At first glance you might not know what to make of Darwinia, a God-game based around the

Developer: **Introversion**
Publisher: **Pinnacle**
Format: **PC**
Release date: **2005**

www.darwinia.co.uk

the fittest

geek and gaming culture. The retro-style graphics are a direct result of the game's roots; being a small team Introversion prefers to keep things simple and optimal. Darwinia's residents, the Darwinians, are single-polygon characters that you control indirectly through orders, or programs. The world is really the creation of one Dr Sepulveda (a name taken from a street in Los Angeles), a mad developer who combined old gaming machines and retro games to create this virtual simulated world where his characters reside. Darwinians are actually spirits from a central repository that assume a life in the main world, gaining experience by doing tasks and interacting with each other. Eventually these characters die and their spirits return to the repository, enriching the collective.

Crisis hits when a virus infects the system and the doctor, desperate not to lose decades of work, enlists your help to fight the scourge. Armed with programs, you enter Darwinia as a god, able to direct the citizens, traverse the world and ultimately remove the virus and its creations. This is all done via programs. Playing Darwinia involves using the doctor's other creations: sentry, engineer and security programs that can in turn be used to herd the citizens of the world, repair broken areas

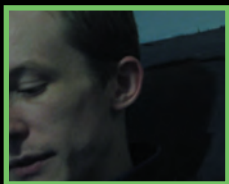
and even take the enemy head-on with digital weapons and grenades. Controlled in a style that the developers compare to Syndicate, these programs become your access to Darwinia and its citizens – an important synergy because as you progress so does the infection and you will be forced to upgrade your software and the Darwinians if your intention is to beat the monster.

Darwinia's visuals look suitably retro, reminding us a lot of the classic Sentinel, while it brings in modern technology for that additional level of polish. This seems to deliver a simplistic feel that at the same time could compete with any big-budget game in the market. The real test is the critical balance between visuals and how the game plays. Using single-polygon characters in an industry where even RTS characters start to resemble those of earlier 3D shooters might seem risky, but the point behind the game is not to immerse you via

astounding detail in the visuals – instead, as with any decent god simulation, the allure is from progressing in the game, updating your methods to fight the infection and watching the Darwinians, who are never in your direct control, evolve thanks to your actions on the world.

It has been said that genius lies in the achievement of simplicity, something that Darwinia is definitely aspiring for, all without sacrificing those aspects of a game that gamers will look for: depth, variety, and a decent play dynamic with impressive visuals. With Uplink already under Introversion's belt, they definitely have the credentials to be taken seriously and in concept Darwinia sounds like a big deal. Perhaps not wooing the mainstream market but instead building a game that meets a developer's principles and ideals is the key for success – so far, so good...





Chris Delay talks about the past, present and future...

Please can you tell the readers about Introversion, the team creating the game, as well as a little bit about your previous title Uplink.

Introversion Software is a small independent game developer based in the UK. We have just three full time staff. We founded our company in 2001, straight out of university where we all met. Our first game was Uplink, a hacker simulator written by Chris and released initially online, which eventually made it onto the high-street. Because we're such a small company without any offices, we had very low running costs, so the money from Uplink was enough to sustain us for three years while we worked on our second game Darwinia.

Would you say that being original and concentrating on the game dynamic, no matter its commercial success, is one of the prime focuses for Introversion?

Commercial success is an important factor for Introversion, but it's not our primary aim. We are very clear on this - the design of our games is the primary focus, and everything else is secondary. That attitude has led us into some financial problems recently, but it has also ensured our ability to do what we want. We are in a unique position of being free from the control of any publishers or producers, and the three of us own all of Introversion and all of our IP. With each game we need to make enough money to live comfortably for the two or three years that it takes to make our next game. Once we run out of money we start running out of options, and we start getting forced to make decisions we don't want to make. So it's important to us to maximise the profits we make from each of our games, but those profits are not the driving factor.

What has inspired the visual look of Darwinia as it does look very much like David Braden's Virus and a collection of other golden oldie titles?

The look of the game is decidedly retro and there is a ton of old 80s games that make appearances within this one, both in terms of the

visual style, and the play dynamic. We've tried to produce something that reminds people of the golden age of videogames, but still has a very modern look and feel to it. There is no one game that we've borrowed the look from it's like a melting pot, with old games and movies thrown in and mixed around.

The game is about a deadly virus. How does it manifest itself and what are the strategic ways the player can get rid of it?

The virus appears as a series of destructive red creatures that the player has to battle. Dr Sepulveda was in the middle of writing some game programs for Darwinia when this virus appeared, so he gives you these small Insertion Squads which you can control directly. They are armed with lasers and grenades, and their control is very reminiscent of Cannon Fodder and Syndicate. These Insertion Squads are the primary form of control for the player.

There is no direct way to control the native Darwinians, but you can promote individuals to Officers and use them to give orders. With this method you can herd the Darwinians around the map. Most of the locations in Darwinia have been shutdown or damaged by the viral infection, so Engineer units can be used to repair and reprogram buildings.

Does the game offer more than strategy - are there action elements and is there a progression of differing challenges?

Darwinia is primarily a fast action game, with a number of different strategy elements thrown into the mix. Many of the buildings in Darwinia require Darwinians to operate, so it becomes an important task to keep them under your control and ensure they are where you want them to be. Every creature in Darwinia has a digital spirit at its core, including the Virii, since they used to be Darwinians and have been corrupted by the infection. When any creature in the game dies it leaves behind its digital spirit, and these become the primary resource in the game. Your Engineers can collect them and reprocess them back into normal Darwinians, or the enemy can pick them up and use them to fertilise eggs to

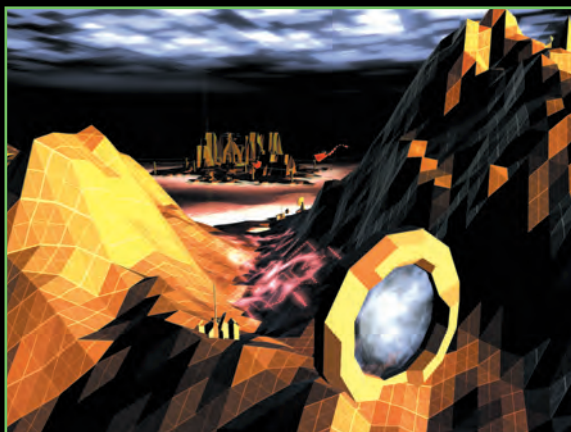
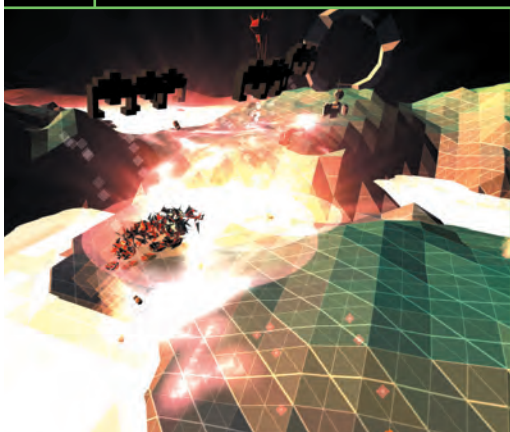
produce even more Virii.

We are told the game has taken 3 years to complete. Can you talk a little about how it may have changed and how technology focused you are?

Originally Darwinia was designed to be a quick three month project, but it quickly expanded into something much bigger. It was originally going to be multiplayer only, and the Darwinians were the only creatures in game, with each player controlling large armies of tens of thousands of them on the battlefield. Our original technology was built to allow tens of thousands of sprites in the game world, each one a simple flat character in 3D space. This idea came from the Indie Game Jam during their first year they experimented with games involving tens of thousands of units on screen at once. Since then the ideas have slowly changed, but the core technology is still there.

How big is the world and is it level based?

Darwinia is a level based game, with each mission carefully designed. Darwinia is not the open-ended gaming experience that Uplink was as we are now going for a much more purposefully built world, with clearly defined levels that accomplish specific tasks within Darwinia. But we've taken care to ensure there are always a number of levels open to the player, to minimise the chance of someone getting stuck. **N**





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Haunting Ground



PS2


Developer: Capcom · **Publisher:** Capcom · **Supplier:** Ster Kinekor [011] 445 7900 · **Genre:** Survival Horror
Release Date: Q1 2005

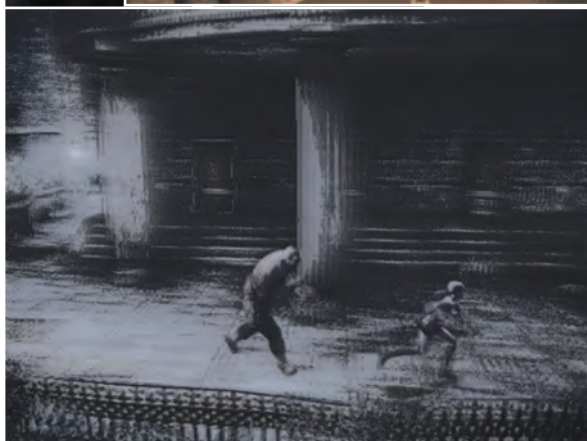
Any Clock Tower fans around? Not a lot of people have actually had the chance to enjoy one of the more cerebral survival horrors, featuring a character that could freak out with terror and run amok out of your control. Haunting Ground, affectionately known as Demento in Japan, takes a feather from Clock Tower's cap and then pushes that experience a step further, putting you inside the head of your lead character. And it's not a first person title...

As much as they seem similar, there seems to be no indication that the

Clock Tower team has anything to do with Haunting Ground (though both are Capcom games). You play as Fiona, a girl trapped in a foreboding castle, not knowing why she's there or why things are after her. Early on she'll release Hewie, a dog, from a trap and the animal will slowly learn to trust her as she gets him to do tasks and attack monsters - apparently building a bond with the dog is very important to surviving the game.

The real treat, though, will be in playing Fiona. You'll be able to experience her heart beats through the controller, adding to the feeling of anxiety as she gets more spooked (and her heart naturally speeds up). She'll also become harder to control and more prone to fall over as her fear increases (ala Clock Tower) and even the visuals will slowly fade into monochrome colours as her tension (and yours) builds. Hiding is one way to alleviate these fears and get things back to normal.

Survival Horrors have been eagerly exploring the idea of psychological effects in their play dynamic, spear-headed by Silent Hill's efforts. The game mechanics in Clock Tower was sadly missed by a lot of gamers thanks to the poorer next-generation titles, so Haunting Ground's promise for an intense, horrific experience sounds like a great idea - providing your heart can take it. 



"Yes, that definitely is an impacted molar you have there."

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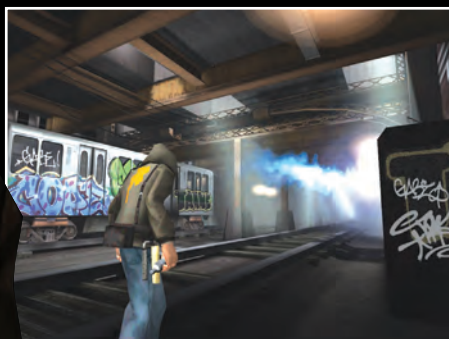
SPARK

Contents Under Pressure



PS2 | XBOX


Developer: The Collective • **Publisher:** Atari • **Supplier:** WWE [011] 462 0150 • **Genre:** Urban Action Adventure
Release Date: June 2005



Urban street culture! That's what it's all about these days, isn't it? We can't really lament the transition from riding cows to riding rollerblades, and ponder over the innocence of yesteryear, since NAG has always been an urban dweller, preferring sidewalks to muddy ditches. And since graffiti artists are now actually being acknowledged and street sports like skating is back in fashion of a decade-or-so hiatus, it's only bound to attract game developers to the concept of the modern urban landscape and its possibilities.

Mark Ecco, graphics artist and fashion designer with his own label Ecco Inc, is apparently the man to talk to on all things street hip, so much so that he's working on a game alongside The Collective who, despite their last game *Wrath*, do a good job when it comes to games.

Basically, *Contents Under Pressure* is about self-expression and the fight for creative freedom. In short you're a graffiti artist and you need to put your art on display. Playing as Trane, you run around, putting your art up on walls in the oppressive city of New Radius to gain street 'cred', though soon your rebelling tendencies sees you as the unlikely leader of a revolution.

Combat meets agility and stealth as you take part in street brawls, sneak into restricted areas and try to put your work up on any surface you can reach. Not a lot more has been revealed, but it should make for an interesting change in games, providing The Collective make this far less linear than their former titles. Ecco used his influence to contract over fifty well-known graffiti artists to provide styles and work for the project, so at least we know it will have a nice, authentic touch. But it's far too sketchy to know if we're supposed to get excited yet. It sounds interesting, though... 

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Stubbs the Zombie



PC | XBOX

Developer: Wideload Games · Publisher: Aspyr Media · Supplier: TBA · Genre: Adventure
Release Date: 2005

Wideload games, a development studio formed by some ex-Bungie members including Bungie founder and Halo creator Alex

Seropian, has unveiled what they are working on for a flagship title. Stubbs the Zombie: Rebel Without a Pulse might sound a bit corny, but that's immediately replaced by the cool notion of actually playing a living, breathing zombie. Well, an undead, asphyxiated one, but you get the picture.

So what does it involve? Well, as Stubbs you'll be able to do all those Zombie things while roaming through Punchbowl, PA, a modern city with some classic sensibilities in its design. Using Zombie strength Stubbs can smash through doors, barricades and other things folk like to use to keep the undead outside. And like any reanimated corpse Stubbs can devour the minds of human victims, turning them into zombies as well, thus joining his ever-growing horde. It gets better: Stubbs can use a variety of weapons, including the Gut Grenade, and a severed hand is useful for slipping through tight spaces and possessing hapless victims from afar. You can also use Stubbs' head as a bowling ball - we're not sure how that would help, but it sounds interesting. Stubbs can also break wind "beyond the ken of normal men".

In return, the metropolis of Punchbowl will throw tanks, soldiers, mad scientists and the world's deadliest barbershop quartet at you and your brain-dead followers. The power behind the game will be the familiar territory of the Halo engine, though Wideload are promising some serious graphical enhancements (that said, the Halo 2 engine is looking pretty impressive as it is) such as new pixel shader effects, graphical methods to give a more cinematic feel and an AI system that will apparently present us with the most keenly intelligent mindless zombies ever seen in a game - not really a hard feat, but we don't like our undead that clever anyway.

From our point of view, it looks tongue-in-cheek but also suitably gory, as the screens show. Zombie games tend to be stuck in the survival horror mould and mostly Resident Evil at that. With Capcom's shooter heading towards crazy hillbillies, maybe it's a good time to dig deeper in the undead mythology. And taking into consideration Bungie's gaming repertoire with Halo, Oni and the Marathon series, Stubbs could well be a big hit. **N**





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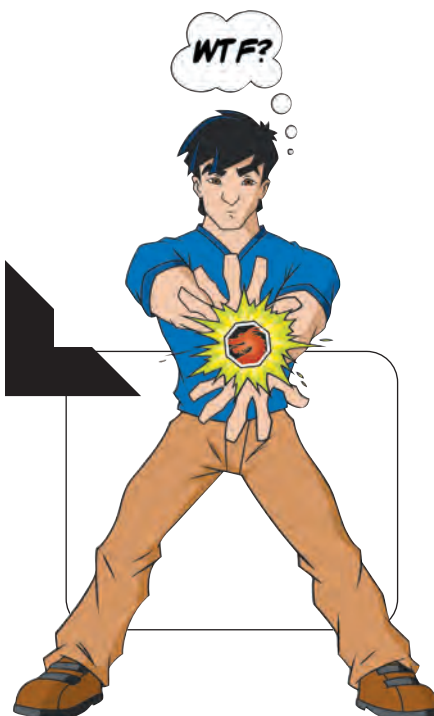
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Off License

Licensing content almost guarantees great sales for a poor product....

This month we see two sides of the same coin - the good and bad faces of licensed games. The initial dubious response that many gamers have when encountering a game licensed from another form of entertainment is understandable... for the most part licensed games are an ugly affair. It seems that the overall attitude taken by developers is that the license will sell itself, so the amount of work they need to put in to make a successful game is far less than when making a title that can't rely on something else's reputation. Maybe it's not a conscious decision, but the number of games that bear a license and simultaneously suck the teat is far too great to be coincidental.

Still, the public at large snap these titles up with a great degree of relish, proving that the title of a game can be enough to shift units off of the shelves (provided, of course, that the title contains the name of some identifiable entity that proved popular with a similar segment of consumers.) It's only when the buyers get

home that they realise they fell for a fast one. And yet, when the next licensed title appears, off they rush to add it to their collection of gaming effluent.

Theoretically, licenses are a great way for young development houses to get their name out, and make a good profit to boot. However, one would think that these smaller developers have a lot more to prove if they are to one day compete with the big names out there, and that their games should be of the highest possible standard. Alas, this idea is as far from reality as it can get.

It does seem, though, that certain developers have not yet let their love for money interfere with the pride they have in their work. Take a look at the Chronicles of Riddick: Escape from Butcher Bay review in this issue to see how a licensed game should be handled. And then check out the Jackie Chan Adventures review to see how they shouldn't be done. Off you go!

In case you didn't know yet...

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Any game scoring between 85 and 90 on our super tough scoring system gets this award. It's a mark of quality.



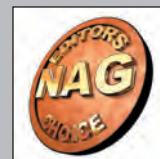
Award of Excellence

91 and above in the score box gets a game this coveted and world famous accolade. Only the best of the best get this rare and sought after award.



Editor's Choice

Once in a while, a game comes along that displays certain qualities which our editor likes. Pretty colours and loud noises help...



Platform

Platforms are described using icons rather than just plain old words. For those of you who don't know (shame on you) they are, left to right, top to bottom: Game Boy Advance, GameCube, N-Gage, PC, PS2 and Xbox.

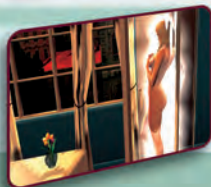


Scoring

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Evil Genius

PC
ReviewSilver
Award

Suggested Retail Price: R 299.00 · **Developer:** Elixir Studios · **Publisher:** Vivendi Universal
Supplier: Nu Metro [011] 340 9345 · **Genre:** Strategy · **Reviewer:** Michael James

Minimum Specifications: Pentium 3 800MHz · 128 MB RAM · 8 x CD ROM · 16 MB Video Card · 1.4 GB HDD

Most computer games expect you to be the hero and save the day, Evil Genius expects you to be the bad guy and rule the world. This type of game is rare, in fact the last time we saw something like Evil Genius was Dungeon Keeper and its sequel [about 5 years ago]. In Dungeon Keeper you were the evil overlord of a dungeon, in Evil Genius you still get to play an evil overlord but instead of a mouldy old dungeon you have your very own uninhabited volcanic island of undisclosed location, and it's from this secret base that you must plot, plan and laugh in an ominous way while you make your bid for world domination.

In the game you assume the role of an evil genius, think Dr. Evil from Austin Powers or, if you're older, Goldfinger from James Bond. If you're thinking all this sounds a little plagia-

ried you'd be correct, the game uses evil villain lore and contemporary Hollywood mythology to great cheesy effect, from the epic orchestral theme tune to the giant carnivorous plants that protect the entrance to your evil lair. A large part of what makes this game so enjoyable is that it's absolutely loaded with 'evil villain' clichés and the good news is that there's much more to the game than this single spark of originality and a handful of laughs - it's rather good, so good in fact you'll have trouble leaving it alone and when you're not plotting and doing evil you'll be thinking about it... all the time.

Most of the game is played from an isometric point of view with the occasional trip to various management screens where you can increase the number of minions in your base, send henchmen and other staff around the world to steal money/plot or even do a little scientific research; this is important

because you can't invent a tank full of piranha traps if you don't have an evil scientist or three. For the most part you don't control the workforce in your base but instead decide, for example, where to build a freezer to store the remains of the good guys who asked the wrong questions or how large your kitchen should be. Once you've marked an appropriate space on the main base map screen and decided how many freezer racks or mixing bowls you want installed, clicking on build will send your minions scurrying about. You do have direct control over your evil genius [and any henchmen that decide to join you] and besides moving him around the map you can also execute unworthy minions or escape danger by entering your inner sanctum. In essence Evil Genius is more about management than action, and instead of putting a bullet into an agent of good why not set up a few sensors and traps so you



Interrogate this cosmonaut to reveal information on a doomsday device

Second Opinion

While not everyone will see the appeal behind killing off the forces of good and building an empire of evil, Evil Genius is the kind of game that gets you coming back for more - no matter how frustrating it might become.

It requires a degree of lateral thinking and can be downright ridiculously challenging at times, but the game certainly is fun to play. The twisted humour and homage paid within the title alone make it a worthwhile experience. Simple controls, great sound and perfectly suited stylised graphics are the order of the day here, making Evil Genius enjoyable on virtually every level.

Walt Pretorius - 80%



Enemy agents can be annoying




The control room - the more panels, buttons and computers in here the better your international intelligence

can watch him get eaten by a giant Venus flytrap. The play dynamic throughout the game is the same - receive missions and tasks via an objectives screen [such as steal valuable treasure, kidnap military experts or club a few baby seals on live television], go to the world map and place the required agents to get the job done, bake for a few minutes and reap the rewards. There is a catch however as these completed objectives will increase your notoriety and in turn the amount of attention you'll receive from the forces of good. This can be painful as a handful of special agents on your island can quickly prove to be a costly and potentially deadly occasion. It's important to find a balance between doing evil and laying low. This base building, mission completing and general evil empire management is what you'll be doing most of the time with the overall objective of building a rocket and unleashing a little doomsday on the world. It's a compelling and engrossing style of game that keeps offering up new items to research and

build right until the end of the game. To further add to the re-playability you can assume the identity of one of three different evil geniuses before the game starts and during the game you can decide on one of three different doomsday devices to build, now if you add three different levels of difficulty to that you potentially have a decent amount of game on your hands, however the journey can be a lengthy affair [although this depends on your personality i.e. how you play it - slow and careful or fast and dangerous] and is somewhat overly complicated. In the end this potential variation isn't a big enough carrot to warrant playing the game more than twice... at a push.

As you'd expect there are some issues that plague the game and one of the more annoying problems is the lack of adequate documentation, the manual is a scant affair that fails to go into the hundreds of nuances that feature while you play. To make up for this the game does feature a number of tutorial videos and detailed information on most aspects but you'll eventually need

to visit the Evil Genius website and read a few of the hints to get through the game. The overall feeling is that the game expects players to figure everything out without much help, and if you miss a critical information screen somewhere you can be left playing for ages while waiting for something to happen but because you didn't tunnel out this section of rock for example, the current task can never be completed. The game also features some annoying and pedantic game devices such as having to visit each territory on the world map to send your agents into hiding should the forces of good come snooping - why not have this option on automatic or allow this automation to be researched and 'bought'? It's almost as if the developer added this extra level of management just to keep the player involved - a fair argument but there are better ways of doing this. The game also features a few game dynamic and design bugs that result in a number of quirky happenings but overall only a few minor tweaks and refinements prevent this from being a classic title. Evil Genius is technically superb and is paced according to each individual player, you can spend ages accumulating cash and refining your base or you can risk it all and send agents all over the world to do evil. The great part is that it's all up to the individual style of each player.

This is definitely one game that demands a sequel - let's just hope we're not left waiting for an eternity [Dungeon Keeper 3 anyone?]. Well done to Elixir on this title and based on their previous game Republic, this is definitely one hot development team to watch and take note of when they announce their new game. 

So good in so many ways that you'll end up renting a few old Bond movies for the weekend

86



Star Wars: Battlefront




PC
Review

Suggested Retail Price: R 299 · **Developer:** Pandemic · **Publisher:** LucasArts
Supplier: EA Africa [011] 516 8300 · **Genre:** First Person Shooter · **Reviewer:** James Francis
Minimum Specifications: Pentium 3 1 GHz · 256 MB RAM · 8 x CD ROM · 64 MB Video Card · 2.9 GB HDD

I'll rush to the point and declare this: if you ever wanted Battlefield in the Star Wars universe, you've got it. It might seem like downright plagiarism: Battlefront has absolutely nothing to do with DICE's game, but you can hardly fault a game model that works. If it will bolster the argument, Battlefield isn't so much a game as a genre and I for one am more than happy to see variations on the theme. Besides, flying an aircraft into your own tanks is only funny for so long...

Battlefront, developed by Full Spectrum Warrior team Pandemic, got a multiple-platform birth (as the page next door testifies), something that does make the game a bit cumbersome in places. Some put this down to a lack of polish, but I think not enough thought went into the interface design. Still, the only people who'll pick up on that are Battlefield players. And even with such quirks, the sheer combination of the Star Wars license, a concept that works and LucasArts not doing the development works very well.

The single player campaign is quite extensive and will take you to all the battlefields stretching over the franchise's vast territories; you'll be part of the siege on Hoth and you can defend the palace on Naboo or take out the natives in Endor - in short everything you can do is the main purpose of the game: multiplayer. Battlefront spans both the Imperial and Clone eras and you can play on either side of both conflicts. There are also tactical bonus characters, such as having Darth Vader or Mace Windu - though they can't be played they offer a tactical advantage to the side using them. Players are the grunts that trek through the deserts of Tatooine or the clone facility on Tipoca City capturing strategic points and reducing the rival teams spawn tickets.

Battlefront does have a few points above its peer. Aircraft such as the Tie Fighter and X-Wing are very easy to control. Battlefront is also graphically superior to Battlefield's aged Torque engine and has some of the most lush and inspiring scenery I've seen in a massively multiplayer FPS. It's not perfect, but it's a blast and worth anyone's attention willing to duke it out over a network Star Wars style. 

A pretty solid second to Battlefield with better graphics and the Star Wars universe to back it up

81



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Rome: Total War



PC
Review



Silver
Award

Suggested Retail Price: R 299.00 · **Developer:** Creative Assembly · **Publisher:** Activision · **Supplier:** MegaRom
[011] 234 2680 · **Genre:** Real Time Strategy · **Reviewer:** Walt Pretorius

Minimum Specifications: Pentium 3 800MHz · 256 MB RAM · 8 x CD ROM · 64 MB Video Card · 2 GB HDD

First there was Shogun, and then Medieval, with the Vikings expansion. Now Creative Assembly returns with a new title, based on one of the greatest empires ever known - Rome.

As to be expected, this title offers the player the highest level of strategic play, as was the case with all the game's predecessors. However, Rome Total War hits the desktop screen with bigger armies, better graphics and revamps that make this management cross strategy title a masterful thing indeed. And this time, it's the player's goal to be the emperor of Rome.

For those that are unfamiliar with the series, the Total War games can be divided into two major sections - a management section and a strategic section.

The management section is almost reminiscent of Risk, during which the player moves armies, builds cities and

generally attends to affairs of state in a turn based kind of way. This section is vital to get right, because the strength of the player's army is determined at this point. Upgrading cities and managing taxes just right will result in more powerful units being available, while mismanagement will do nothing more than bring an early end to the game. But there are more demands placed on the player at this time - the Roman Senate issues the player with various tasks that, if completed, result in rewards for the player which range from extra money and units through to games thrown to keep the populace of various towns happy. The player that does not want to battle through this section of the game too much can set cities to auto-manage themselves, but this results in a loss of control. Also, Senate missions (which include conquests and political missions) can not be auto-managed. Neither can assassi-

nations and sabotage, which are also handled from this screen.

Another important part of the management section of the game is the production and movement of parties. Each has a limited move distance, depending on the units within the army. Ships can also transport the players units around the map in a much easier fashion than before.

Those that are familiar with the series will notice that the biggest revamp to the game took place here. Instead of static units and moderately detailed maps, the units are now fully animated and the landscape is just that - a detailed and interesting environment.

The other major part of the game - and arguably what it's all about - is the strategic section. Any battle entered into during the turn based management play can be automatically resolved, or handled directly by the player. Tactics are important here -



Yep, it's a great big detailed, complex world out there, Brutus...

using the right kind of squad at the right time is important, but a player who keeps his wits about him can take advantage of the Roman army's high discipline levels to best much larger armies.

This is a game best viewed from a long distance away. While the individual units are not incredibly highly detailed, the overall effect of vast armies clashing in battle is truly spectacular. A high level of detail adds to the game too - particles, effects and the like all make the battles very realistic and enjoyable to watch.

A wide variety of conditions, situations and opponents keep the battles interesting, but playing every single battle that comes along makes the game incredibly long. Not a bad thing, but many players will probably find a balance between automatically decided and personally controlled battles. Some varieties of battles include ambush situations and sieges (a personal favourite, because firing a rock hurling onager into a cluster of Greek hoplites is just

too damned funny for words).


One little complaint concerning the real time battles is the camera. While it is capable, its controls take a little getting used to - they aren't the usual controls that one might expect.

While the voices and music may get a little annoying at times, the overall sound quality of the game is impressive - a good compliment to the rest of the title. And the controls are also simple yet effective, making playing the game not too much of a chore - more of a pleasure, really.

While there is only one campaign as such, it is quite long (depending on how many battles you personally control) and can be played several times with one of the various factions available for play. Additionally, extra historical battles are included to further challenge the player.

Historically accurate and detailed, the overall feel of the game is one of realism and seriousness. The humorous overtones that many games feature are missing, which is not a bad thing, con-

sidering the subject matter. Rome Total War is a serious game for serious strategists, realistic and complex while not being overly involved ... and it is seriously enjoyable.

Rome Total War is a great game when all is said and done. It may have limited appeal to gamers that like their strategy light, fluffy and generally uncomplicated, but the variable nature of the game and the depth of play should keep the more serious strategy fan quite happy for a good long time. 

The third instalment of the series sees a huge revamp, and delivers more of what made it great

85



Star Ocean: Till the End of Time



PlayStation 2
Review

It has been almost 8 years since the first Star Ocean, one of the true pillars of the RPG genre on consoles, appeared on the Super Nintendo Entertainment System back in 1996. Despite never having a proper English-translated release, its sequel 'Star Ocean: The Second Story' on the PlayStation was met with critical success in 1998. It's been a long wait, but fans and newcomers to the series can both rejoice at the arrival of the third in the series, here to remind certain companies exactly what it is that the gamers want from their console-style Role Playing Games.

Characteristically, Star Ocean 3 has more than enough plot to satisfy even the critics, especially since knowledge of the previous titles in the series is not required. Essentially, you follow the lead protagonist through an epic sci-fi jaunt filled with space travel and discovery, adventure at every corner while exploration and frantic battles keep you on your toes. Actually, that's not entirely true. A good chunk of the start of the game is unfortunately spent in a rather docile holiday resort with each dialogue drawn-out and lifeless. Once past this section however (thanks to a handy attack by an unknown space militia), Star Ocean 3 begins to shine with an unsurpassed brilliance. At its centre, inside the exploration and expressive dialogue with interesting

characters lies an advanced real-time battle system. Players can execute planned synchronized attacks and other collaborative actions, while controlling any of the three characters in a battle or handing the reigns of teammates off to an AI. For the most part combat is an adrenal affair with perhaps a bit too much button-mashing, but it helps keep things interesting after countless battles.

Each battle, and indeed each scene in the game is rendered in breathtaking detail all in real-time, a rather impressive feat. Overall, the entire game sports stunning and stylish graphics, including the cut-scenes, maps and futuristic environments. Even the smaller yet interesting aspects of the game, such as the ability to create your own items from scratch or by combining items seem lusciously detailed. Multiple endings based on your interactions with various members of your party is certainly a welcome addition to the

longevity. Presented on two DVDs (an impressive feat considering the size of a DVD), Star Ocean: Till the End of Time is one of those rare quality titles that will forever be fondly remembered.

Enough depth to sink a ship
once over the initially
ponderous start

80



Sample Caption



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Psi Ops: The Mindgate Conspiracy



PlayStation 2
Review



Silver
Award

Suggested Retail Price: R 489.00 · **Developer:** Midway · **Publisher:** Midway
Supplier: Ster Kinekor [011] 445 7900 · **Genre:** Action · **Reviewer:** Miktar Dracon
Requirements: 1 Player · 300kb Memory · Analog compatible · Vibration compatible

It's always an incredible sight when a game manages to come out of left-field and surprise the market with unexpected pizzazz. A straight sleeper-hit, Psi Ops: The Mindgate Conspiracy takes the third-person action genre, mixes in some psychic power and shows the industry exactly how it's done, almost as if it read our minds.

While not Oscar-winning material, the general plot behind Psi Ops is solid enough to do the trick. The player must infiltrate a super soldier army then get past its psychic agents and ultimately save the world, perhaps even get the girl. On it's own the plot might not achieve much, but combined with interesting Psychic capabilities, seven immersive levels and multiple ways to solve missions the overall effect is very, very appealing.

It wouldn't be a game about Psi powers, if the powers themselves weren't interesting and functional. Unlike the similarly themed game Second Sight, the powers in Psi Ops are hard-hitting and inventively used. It all comes down to solving situations in a variety of ways, depending on the creativity of the player. Weapon-based combat can be combined with the Psi mind powers to devastating (and satisfying) effect. Staple-power Telekinesis provides the ability to lift people and inanimate objects, holding them in place, moving them around or throwing them in any direction. Thanks to unhindered yet pinpoint control, gingerly throwing enemies into spinning blades, holding an enemy in the air and shooting them at point black or even chucking an explosive canister into a group of marines is easy and fun. On a more destructive note, Pyrokinesis simply launches a wall of fiery death, igniting everything in its path and is often used as a last-resort. Providing a much appreciated air of strategy, Remote Viewing allows the player to step outside of their body for a bit and float through doors unnoticed, allowing needed reconnaissance and information gathering. Often, unlocking a door or getting past certain defences requires 'sneaking' into a locked office and looking around for the required code numbers. Aside from espionage using Remove Viewing effectively lets the player plan ahead to either avoid conflict or to scope out the


positions of enemies and explosives. Finally, Mind Control is perfect for the covert sadomasochists out there, letting you take complete control of an enemy from a distance. Once inside the body, you can either dispose of it by running up to an explosive barrel and shooting it, or by trying to take out as many 'team-mates' as possible before finally being taken down upon which you will resume control of your old body.

Each power forms a part of a larger action/stealth balance, allowing either for strategic play or intense fast-paced gunplay. The combination of traditional weapons such as automatic rifles and Psi-powers creates an extraordinary and powerful dynamic. However, all of this would be completely useless if the enemies weren't challenging or intelligent. Surprisingly, the AI of your opponents is mercilessly adaptive. Each enemy is extremely aware of the player's actions and will react appropriately. If seen in time, Psi-thrown barrels will be acrobatically dodged and Mind Controlled enemies will be swiftly dispatched, giving you no quarter. The effect is quite realistic, making each encounter unique and deep.

Every mission on its own has multiple solutions, non-linear design allowing for a wide girth of replay value. While the plot itself is fixed as well as the objectives, how each objective is approached and ultimately achieved can vary depending on the player's mood. Don't feel like gunplay? Telekinetically chuck a few explosives into the room, grab an enemy behind impenetrable glass with Telekinesis and bash his head against the window until he's dead. It should be noted at this point that Psi Ops is a very violent and bloody game. Draining Mind Power from an enemy involves exploding heads and flecks of brain, lifting enemies into spinning blades results in meaty chunks of flesh as well as the appropriate screams. It's no wonder the game carries a mature rating. The detail in death thankfully carries over to other aspects of the game too. Levels contain a lot of small incidental details and overall each character model is detailed and fluid. Motion capture was put to good effect for the scripted sequences while ragdoll physics assure that each body flops realistically over railings and down stairs. Every action is

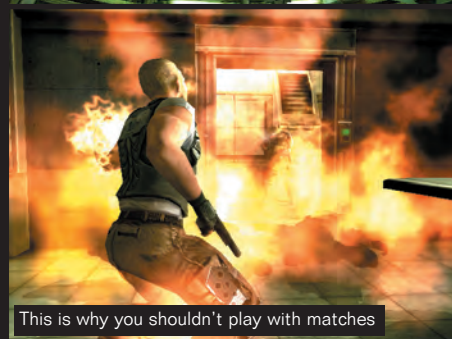
met with the correct sound, letting an unquantifiable feeling of solidity permeate throughout the entire game.

To sweeten the deal, several bits of content can be unlocked depending on a variety of objectives, including a rather interesting 'cooperative' mode where one controller is responsible for movement and aiming, while the second controller directly controls shooting and Psi powers.

Despite an often unrelenting difficulty curve, the entire experience of playing Psi Ops is solid and innovative. Combining powers in new ways, looking at a scenario differently each time you play as well as the quality attention to detail makes for a stunning title with broad (if bloody) appeal. 

*A gritty and highly enjoyable
action title with some smart psy-
chic moves*

85



This is why you shouldn't play with matches



"Dude, are you high?"

Colin McRae Rally 2005

PC
ReviewSilver
Award

Suggested Retail Price: R 299.00 · **Developer:** Codemasters · **Publisher:** Codemasters
Supplier: MegaRom [011] 234 2680 · **Genre:** Driving · **Reviewer:** Walt Pretorius

Minimum Specifications: Pentium 3 1GHz · 256 MB RAM · 2 x DVD ROM · 64 MB Video Card · 3 GB HDD

When it comes to rally games, few can hold a candle against the spotlight that is the Colin McRae series.

Time and again these games have thrilled driving simulation fans the world over, and this new edition will certainly carry on the tradition.

The changes to this game, when compared to the previous title, are almost purely cosmetic. The game looks a lot better than before, but, quite frankly, it's hard to improve on a game that was already such a top notch title. But looks wise a lot has been done. A superb visual damage model (which also affects game performance, mind you) is combined with thoroughly detailed and gorgeous tracks, great particle and lighting effects and a few little details (like leaves falling from struck trees and a hazy blur which momentarily fuzzes up the screen when

you crash) make looking at the game a treat.


With a vast amount of cars (some of which seem quite unlikely as rally vehicles, like new Beetles and Ford Escorts) and challenging tracks, this game should prove enjoyable to those who enjoy their driving varied and generally dirty. A wide variety of settings and conditions mixed with the numerous game modes is included, making Colin McRae Rally 2005 a long and ever challenging game.

The control system smacks of the console that the game was obviously ported from, but it is nonetheless smooth and responsive enough to make for a fun gaming experience.

The game is neither overly simple nor horribly complicated, making it quite main-stream in its appeal. Those that like their racing gaming technical may find the game a little too simple but, for the most part, the title is detailed

enough (with adjustable vehicles and the like) to keep the majority of players happy.

With clear and concise "navigator" prompts, the game is eminently playable. The tracks can get rather tricky, though - as is pretty usual with this series - and there is bound to be a little frustration on the player's side... particularly where upgrade tests are involved.

Taking a step back and looking at this game as a whole, one sees a refined, polished and highly enjoyable title that will appeal to fans of the previous games and newcomers to the series alike. 

A polished and fun rally title
with a wide appeal

85



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Tribes: Vengeance



PC
Review

Proving it's hard to keep a good license down, developer Irrational Games picks up where the now defunct Dynamix left off and brings us Tribes: Vengeance. As games switch from one development house to the next however, changes are inevitable.


A big change to the series is the inclusion of a 'full fledged' single player campaign. Over the course of the campaign, players will view the story from 3 different angles; two Phoenix leaders, an Imperial mother and daughter and an enigmatic assassin. Each part adds up to a whole, the secret reason behind the ongoing tribal wars. For the most part, the single player is an amiable affair but is essentially nothing more than a snazzy tutorial dressed up to its best. It serves its purpose however, letting Tribes die-hards hone their skills and allowing the uninitiated to come up to speed before attempting the main focus of the game; the online battles. There's no denying that Tribes: Vengeance was made solely for multiplayer, but the tacked-on single player tutorial certainly does help bridge the gap between the faithful old generation and the newcomers to the series.

New additions to your armaments also make for a distinct change from its progenitors. The Buckler, a portable boomerang shield certainly has become a crowd favourite while the grappling hook has Spiderman fans entranced while past favourites such as the explosive-disc shooting Spinfusor and mortar launcher have returned

unchanged. While weapon load outs are still done at stations, the organization of load outs has been revamped. Personal weapon load outs are easily recalled after a respawn, while the new limited weapon slots (3 maximum) makes for judicious choices. Each of the three armour classes still represents a choice in pros and cons depending on your play style, with light armour perfect for those who enjoy mobile sniping while inversely the heavy armour is nothing short of a mobile weapons platform.

Each armour comes with the expected Tribes jetpack, reasonably unchanged except for the refined 'skiing' which is now the simple and entertaining affair of simply gliding across the landscape in a natural and fluid motion.

Several problems with the interface and game dynamics aside, Tribes junkies out there might be put off by this streamlining of the franchise. None the less, this new incarnation of the

series will definitely breathe new life into Tribes by appealing to a broader audience and providing solid online multiplayer action. 

A strong multiplayer experience, despite a lustreless single player campaign

71



Second Opinion

Irrational Games promised an immersive single player experience with Tribes: Vengeance, but ultimately failed to deliver. The single player aspect is fun, and serves to assist the new player in learning the notoriously complicated Tribes physics, but to draw comparisons to serious single player games such as Half-Life will always leave Tribes: Vengeance falling short. While the storyline itself is intriguing, you'll probably tire of the repetitive bot action long before the final cut scene.

The multiplayer component of the game is every bit the action-packed, team-based fragfest we were promised. Certain game dynamics - such as skiing and jetting - may be somewhat simplified, but that by no means makes Tribes: Vengeance an easy game. The game still has a substantial (but rewarding) learning curve that requires practice to thoroughly master. It's fast, it's frantic, and it's very much team-based, but perhaps most importantly, it is still Tribes through and through.

Jian 'warcow' Reis 80%



This scene certainly lacks blood splatters and dead Martian demons, marine... oh, sorry...

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Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2005



PC
Review

2004 is the year of Vijay Singh. Any player that can usurp Tiger from his No. 1 spot and convincingly blow past the \$10 Million mark of earnings in a season on the PGA Tour, deserves the accolade of best golfer in the world. His spotlight must be shared with Phil Mickelson and Ernie Els who displayed touches of brilliance and tenacity not often seen in the modern game. However there is another deserved award to be presented, that being the best golf simulation on PC, which is easily scalped by EA Sports Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2005.

Golf simulations were commonplace a few years back as titles such as Links, Jack Nicklaus 6 and PGA Championships all made good efforts in giving players a realistic gaming experience. Now things are significantly different as the count of competitor products dwindles mainly because of EA Sports acquisition of Headgate Studios (developers of Sierra's PGA Champs) that has instantaneously annihilated all competition. Headgate pioneered the "True Swing" mechanism and have now gone on to take the Tiger Woods PGA Tour franchise to the next level.


TW2005 will not be known for its new revolutionary graphics, mostly because it's not new and it's not revolutionary. More to the point the graphics is similar, if not identical, to its 2004 counterpart. But don't let this piece of factual information deter you from what is actually a jam packed golf simulation that offers all levels of play, for first timers and seasoned veterans alike. There has been a drop in the number of courses on TW2005, down from 18 to 11. Most of these are newly licensed alternatives and for us locals there is the added bonus of seeing a South African course as part of the package, this being the Gary Player designed Fancourt Links. Golfers in the know will recognise the course layout from the many hours spent watching the Presidents Cup last year.

As a gameplay package you cannot get better than this 2005 version. It offers a new "Gameface II" character design option that is so comprehensive you can virtually recreate yourself. Gameplay is diverse and challenging with a full player development system that takes you through the amateur

ranks, Q school and finally onto the PGA Tour. If you spend your earnings on the right attributes, you can follow in the footsteps of Mickelson and Singh and win a Major or two. A "Legends" mode pits you against some of the great golfers in history as well as the "Scenarios" mode that unlocks the greats of the game such as Gary Player, Ben Hogan and Jack Nicklaus, to name a few. The "Online" mode is wonderful for those who enjoy challenging human opponents, EA's online service is always populated with willing characters and pre-established tournaments. A new course designer tool called "Tiger Proofing" has been added, which allows you to totally change and toughen up existing courses or develop some radical new course.

Not all is perfect with the 2005 version, there are a number of minor graphical glitches, but more importantly some rather laughable commentary from Gary McCord and David Feherty.

Let it be stated for the record, ignore any advice given from either of the commentators.

This rendition of Tiger Woods is deservedly the leader in golf simulations on the PC. It has original content and month's worth of playing value. As a bonus we get to see local talents such as Retief Goosen and Gary Player, but alas Ernie is missing yet again. For all golfing enthusiasts, this is a must own, and those who enjoy quality sports games, look no further. 

Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2005 is a must own for all golfing enthusiasts

82

SA Golf goes virtual

South Africa finally gets recognition for its contribution to the great game of golf with Retief Goosen and Gary Player making cameo appearances, and a deserved introduction of the Gary Player designed The Links Golf Course, one of the world class courses available on the Fancourt Golf Estate in George.



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Obscure



PlayStation 2
Review



Silver
Award

Suggested Retail Price: R 349.00 **Developer:** Hydravision Entertainment **Publisher:** UbiSoft
Supplier: MegaRom [011] 234 2680 **Genre:** Survival Horror **Reviewer:** Miktar Dracon
Requirements: 1 - 2 Players · 300kb Memory · Analog compatible · Vibration Compatible


The survival horror genre has always had two strong tiers, namely the Silent Hill series and its polar, Resident Evil. Unchallenged, both have become rather stale of late while only upcoming sequels promise some fresh variety. In the meantime however, newcomer Obscure manages to slip in under the radar, turn a few heads and then promptly projectile vomit all over you. In a good way, that is.

To say that Obscure is inspired and influenced by the teen horror movie genre would be to understate the obvious grotesquely. Everything from the five American students to the disappearances that keep occurring at their school is geared towards a rather familiar yet entertaining foray into long eerie corridors and dark hallways containing untold horrors. Light becomes more than a metaphorical weapon against the darkness, creatures shy

away and dissolve under bright sunlight or the beam of a flashlight duct taped to a gun. Thinking ahead and smashing out a classroom's windows saves lives.

In a surprising twist, Obscure features a rather functional multiplayer of sorts. At any point of the game, a second controller can opt in to control another character which would ordinarily be controlled by a rather intelligent AI. The AI itself can be set, either for defence, offensive or general help. This level of control over your team-mate is integral to survival. The second player can join/leave the game at any time, very convenient in most regards. Each of the 5 protagonists can be interchanged at certain points; each sports their own unique and helpful skill either for combat or puzzle-solving. Interactivity between characters during fights, inventory management and riddle solving lends itself to rather unique mutual

aid. Getting to grips with the control scheme takes some time, but thankfully does not prove much of a hindrance.

Despite being disappointingly short (around 4 hours if you know what you're doing), Obscure manages to enthrall and provide one of the better survival horror experiences out there. Much like the movies on which Obscure is based, the game isn't over if one character dies, nor is the game unbeatable when your team is slowly whittled down to a single member. Everyone has to die. With surprising attention to detail, such as character-shaped bloodstains on the floor where a team-mate has died (causing whoever sees it to get down on their knees and cry), Obscure is a diamond in an ocean of zombie zircons. 

Feisty and fun and while not spectacular, definitely engrossing

74



The soon to be dead

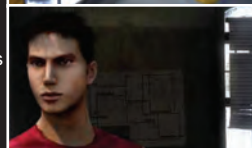
Josh : As a reporter, Josh is always ready to write an article and his curiosity annoys the team.



Stan : Looking a little like Eminem, Stan is the typical bad boy but backs up his flawed character with muscle.



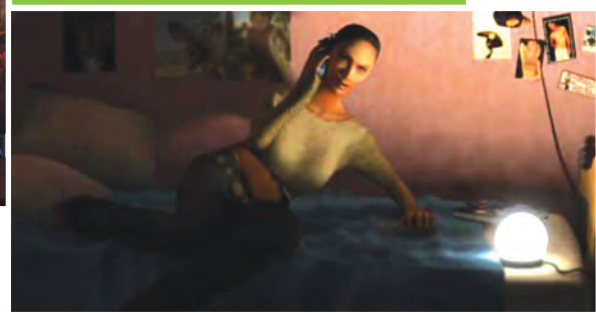
Kenny : The basketball fan, Kenny is able to outrun most things that wish to do him harm.



Shanon : Nerd and Kenny's twin sister, Shanon can easily sum up any situation and make a plan.



Ashley : Kenny's girlfriend and a surprisingly strong fighter, Ashley seems quite at home around guns.



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Fable



Xbox
Review

Suggested Retail Price: TBA · **Developer:** Big Blue Box · **Publisher:** Microsoft · **Supplier:** TBA ·
Genre: RPG · **Reviewer:** Miktar Dracon
Requirements: 1 Player

From the start of its development, Fable (or Project Ego as it was originally called) was intended to be a Role Playing Game where every action taken by the player had a tangible effect on the character and world itself; a true foray into causality allowing for almost infinite adventures was promised to us by the rather credible Peter Molyneux himself.

What we were given however, is a shallow Role Playing Game that fails to live up to anything originally promised. On its own merits, Fable is not a terrible game. Overall presentation is appropriate and graphically it even manages to raise the bar a few notches provided you don't look at the character models.

When looking at aspects such as combat, story, polish and the overall social dynamic things start to fall apart for Fable. After a quick tutorial masquerading as childhood, you are thrust into the lacklustre world and herded along a main quest with the occasional option for side quests. Most of these optional quests are derived from the 'escort, defend area, attack area, find person' templates and primarily serve only to slow the pace of the game. Main quests manage to feel fresh most of the time, though the combat tends to frustrate depending on which tier you focus on; Swords, Bows or Magic; simple melee combat is thankfully clean-cut, magical attacks however cause problems due to poor button assignment. Spells are often inadvertently cast and innocent bystanders are repeatedly killed by accident thanks to the indiscriminate lock-on.

Hacking through the same areas repeatedly and facing the substandard line-up of creatures becomes monotonous. Relief may come in the form of courting love, getting married, buying a house or kicking chickens, but most such activities are fruitless and don't benefit the player in any way other than providing distraction. No emergent game dynamics arise from this and for the most part leading a Good life (not killing innocents, committing crimes and etc.) is uneventful. Hearing the same villager praise sound-bites over and over as you enter towns often act as a deterrent for doing so. Taking the Evil path actually holds the most substance, presenting challenges other-

wise unavailable.

In summary, Fable is incredibly short (around 10 hours), even after pursuing side-quests and pointless endeavours such as getting married or going fishing. Some areas are detailed and alive graphically - trees, towns and marshes all sport detail and quality, whereas the inhabitants of the realm and the monster population are amazingly bland and uninspired.

At the end of the day, Fable fails to live up to its own legend and instead degenerates into a momentary distraction, forgotten in a few weeks. **N**

A moderately average hack 'n slash that both impresses and disappoints

69

All the women of the town had one thing in common: rotten taste in men



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Pacific Fighters



PC
Review

Following up on the highly-acclaimed IL-2 Sturmovik, 1C: Maddox Games have taken the war to the Pacific Theatre with their recent release of Pacific Fighters. The good news for IL-2 owners is that Pacific Fighters not only allows a stand-alone installation, but can also be installed on top of IL-2, effectively becoming an expansion pack for the latter.

Pacific Fighters brings a feature highly anticipated by followers of the IL-2 series: carrier operations. As any player of naval aviation simulators can tell you, carrier ops can be the most challenging and frustrating aspect of these games. Having just fought against hordes of enemy planes you are faced with the daunting task of having to land on a pitching carrier deck in a space not much larger than a football field. Fortunately for non-propeller heads, it is possible to turn off these advanced features and concentrate on the real fun: shooting down the enemy.

The game offers training missions, a single mission mode, a dynamic campaign, a mission builder and a competent multi-player mode. Although slow to start with, the campaign quickly heats up as it mimics reality - the Pacific Ocean is a vast body of water, and with the two opposing sides thousands of nautical miles apart it is very likely that you can fly all day without seeing a single foe. An interesting aspect to the play dynamic is that the player's actions can conceivably influence the outcome of the war. Maddox has programmed the scoring system so as to be biased in favour of the historical victors. However, if you make a sufficiently large dent in the Japanese attack force at Pearl Harbour, for instance, you may give the Allies an advantage in the early stages of the Pacific Campaign. Incidentally, the missions in the campaign mode are randomly generated, and the developers claim that no given mission will ever be repeated identically.


It is pretty much de rigueur for modern combat games to offer solid multi-player capability, and in that respect Pacific Fighters doesn't disappoint. It offers two possibilities: straight dog fighting and a co-operative mode in which all or part of either side can be computer-controlled.

A unique feature of the IL-2 Sturmovik

- Pacific Fighters series is its online campaign. This is similar to co-operative mode, but missions are generated sequentially, with date, time, and battlefield situations developing from one mission to another. As with single player campaigns, players' actions can influence the progress of an online campaign.

The game's graphics are beyond reproach. Damage modelling is very detailed, fires and explosions are impressive, clouds are fluffy and translucent, and enemy fighter pilots are ugly. The same applies to the land and sea details, while the lighting takes full advantage of the capabilities of modern graphics adapters.

Pacific Fighters is not without faults - I had to abandon one campaign after 11 missions because the game insisted on starting the next mission with my aeroplane 30 feet above the water at zero airspeed, with predictable results. There are also examples of rather poor

grammar on the menu screens, which is disappointing in an otherwise excellent product. Despite that, Pacific Fighters is an enjoyable game with all indications of becoming very addictive very quickly. 

Both a worthy successor and a welcome addition to its predecessor

74

Spice of life...

Pacific Fighters allows you to fly for the U.S., Japan, Great Britain, or Australia in famous fighters such as the F6F Hellcat, the deadly Japanese Zero, and the UK's Supermarine Seafire, as well as flyable bombers such as the Aichi D3A1 Val, G4M2 Betty, SBD Dauntless, and A-20 Havoc. Players have the option to take-off from, land on, and engage enemy aircraft carriers in combat. With its extensive tutorials and customizable settings, the game will be appealing to both beginner and expert pilots. 16 new maps are included, covering famous historical locations such as Midway, Okinawa, Pearl Harbour, and Singapore.



Full Spectrum Warrior



PC
Review



Silver
Award

Suggested Retail Price: R 299.00 • **Developer:** Pandemic Studios • **Publisher:** THQ
Supplier: WWE [011] 462 0150 • **Genre:** Real; Time Strategy • **Reviewer:** Miktar Dracon

Minimum Specifications: Pentium 4 2.0GHz • 512 MB RAM • 4 x CD ROM • 32 MB Video Card • 1.7 GB HDD

Military nuts and fans of the Real Time Strategy genre alike can appreciate the subtle technicalities of Full


Spectrum Warrior, now available on PC. Making a faithful leap in translation from the Xbox, players can put their thinking caps on and enjoy the unique combination of tactics and action the game has to offer.

Originally developed as a training aid for the U.S. Army to reinforce Army doctrine and team effort within the troops, Full Spectrum Warrior is possibly one of the more realistic portrayals of contemporary urban warfare.

Commanding the two squads using the simple control scheme is a breeze, although the situations your troops find themselves in often requires quick thinking and planning ahead. Each of the four squad members of both teams is immaculately detailed and realistically animated;

the urban environments are immersive and themed. The true joy of Full Spectrum Warrior however, comes in the form of its network/online cooperative play. Two players team up and control one of the two teams each, working together to complete

the single player missions. The game does incredibly well even on low-bandwidth connections, simply due to the nature of the game mechanics. Included in the PC version are two rather difficult but enjoyable bonus missions, a nice addition to an already sterling game. Full Spectrum Warrior is a refreshing addition to the

current slew of games focusing on war, yet still manages to make enough distinction for itself on its own merits. 

A unique title oozing with quality and style - best played cooperatively

86



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Conflict: Vietnam



PlayStation 2
Review

Suggested Retail Price: R 499.00 · **Developer:** Pivotal · **Publisher:** SCI · **Supplier:** WWE [011] 462 0150
Genre: Action · **Reviewer:** Adam Liebman
Requirements: 1 Player · 71KB memory · Analog: Sticks only · Vibration compatible

The latest in the line of Conflict titles, Conflict: Vietnam tells the story of four soldiers (a medic, sniper, assault weapons specialist, and a heavy weapons specialist) in the Vietnam war, as you might have surmised by now. Like prior titles in the Conflict series, Conflict: Vietnam is a team-oriented third person shooter - in other words, while explicitly controlling a single member of the team, you can issue orders to the others. Throughout the 14 missions, you'll have to ensure that none of the

four characters die - each is vital to the storyline, hence a squad member's death is instant failure. The majority of the missions revolve around a rather generic "search and destroy" objective, though along the way, you'll also be given the chance to take control of several different vehicles. Although the objectives are far from revolutionary, the game manages to keep things moving along at a decent pace, primarily by bombarding you with hordes of enemy troops. It should also be said that each mission is quite long, and

you are allowed only two saves per level, which is certainly a recipe for frustration, and almost inevitably means you'll spend much time replaying already completed portions of each level. On the whole, Conflict: Vietnam is a sound action title, though its lack of innovation makes it quite uninspiring - it's not a bad title by any means, but it's certainly nothing special. [N](#)

Solid, but unremarkable action title - probably best suited to war junkies

68



Samurai Jack: The Shadow of Aku



PlayStation 2
Review

Suggested Retail Price: R 499.00 · **Developer:** Amaze Studios · **Publisher:** SEGA
Supplier: WWE [011] 462 0150 · **Genre:** Platform · **Reviewer:** Adam Liebman
Requirements: 1 Player · 313KB memory · Analog: Sticks only · Vibration compatible

Samurai Jack, Cartoon Network's most famous sword-swinging Japanese guy trapped in the future, has finally made the transition to the PS2, in the form of an unfortunately bland platform game. The storyline ties in closely with the premise of the cartoon series - Jack is on a quest to find a portal that can return him to his own time, and along the way, he helps free a variety of characters from horrible oppression under the evil shapeshifter Aku who, as it happens, was responsi-

ble for catapulting Jack into the future in the first place. Sadly, the storyline is little more than a threadbare excuse for all the hacking and slashing - the game might have been more rewarding had the story been more emphasised. The play dynamic comprises typical platform elements, such as collecting various items, and plenty of jumping, as well as a rather basic combat system, allowing Jack to string together weak and strong sword attacks, as well as fire arrows or throw shuriken at legions of rather boring enemies.

Although the voice-acting, provided by the cast of the show, is entertaining, it isn't enough to make up for the lacklustre implementation of the storyline, nor does it compensate for the un inventive and repetitive play dynamic - Shadow of Aku, sadly, is utterly unexceptional, doing nothing to stand out from the myriad of other titles in this overpopulated genre. [N](#)

Unimaginative platform game offers little more than a flashy licence to hold one's attention

57



Headhunter: Redemption



PlayStation 2
Review

Suggested Retail Price: R 499.00 • **Developer:** Amusement Vision • **Publisher:** Sega
Supplier: WWE [011] 462 0150 • **Genre:** Action • **Reviewer:** Adam Liebman
Requirements: 1 Player | 215KB memory | Analog: Sticks only | Vibration compatible



Set 20 years after the original Headhunter title (which most of us will never have even heard of, being a Dreamcast title), Headhunter: Redemption follows the tale of bounty hunter Jack Wade, in a world comprised of two cities, imaginatively named "Above" and "Below". Needless to say, Above is a world of affluence and luxury, whilst Below is the generally-forgotten wasteland inhabited by the lower classes of society. The game opens with Jack hunting down a young woman whom, by pure coincidence, he rescued from a murderous father years before. Instead of submitting her to the merciless legal system, however, Jack takes her under his wing, and trains her to be a "headhunter". The two of them then embark on a quest reminiscent of any number of sci-fi movies, involving the ubiquitous epic struggle between the archetypal

oppressed rebels and the equally archetypal evil corporate empire. The play dynamic is typical third person shooter fare, and sees you taking control of both Jack Wade and his protégé, Leeza X, while they do little more than run around shooting bad guys and partake in generic fetch quests, usually involving finding key cards to open doors. Thrown in for good

measure is what attempts to be a stealth component, allowing you to sneak along walls and take cover behind various objects in an effort not to get blasted into tiny, squishy bits. Complicating matters, however, is a control system that ultimately proves to be your biggest adversary - often, for no apparent reason, your character will move, and this is accompanied by a sudden change of camera angle. Needless to say, this proves very disorienting, not to mention frustrating, and often results in a number of unnecessary bullet wounds. The end result is that in Headhunter: Redemption, controlling your character often feels more like a game of chance than one of skill. The visuals, thankfully, are fairly decent, as are the sound effects and soundtrack. The voice-acting, however, is downright dreadful - Leeza X, in particular, is one of the most poorly voiced game characters in recent memory, and any scene in which she engages in dialogue is all but guaranteed to make even the hardest of gamers cringe. Ultimately, one is left feeling that Headhunter: Redemption had the potential to be a fairly enjoyable action title, even if the storyline isn't exactly unique - thanks largely to the annoying control issues, though, playing it quickly becomes a tedious, frustrating and thoroughly unrewarding experiencing.

Highly frustrating controls make Headhunter: Redemption a mediocre title, at best

60

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Second Sight



PlayStation 2
Review

Suggested Retail Price: R 469.00 **Developer:** Radical Design **Publisher:** Codemasters
Supplier: Ster Kinekor [011] 445 7900 **Genre:** Action **Reviewer:** Adam Liebman
Minimum Specifications: 1 Player · 157KB memory · Analog: Sticks only · Vibration compatible

Second Sight, an action/stealth title with a slight twist, opens with a battered and bruised man awakening, cuffed to a hospital bed, with very little idea of where, or even who, he is.

The cuffs mysteriously open, and the character soon learns that despite having lost his memory, he wields some powerful psychic abilities. He then sets out to escape the research facility, and search for his past. As you reach the second level of the game, though, it tells a different story - one involving a

scientist named John Vattic, sent to Russia to investigate the research of a certain mad scientist. The play dynamic is rather typical of titles of this genre, with the exception of Vattic's psychic abilities, at least in the levels that take place in the present-day. As you progress, Vattic learns to manipulate objects by telekinesis, heal himself, and even become temporarily invisible to enemies. The play dynamic is quite solid and entertaining, and the shifts between the psychically-oriented present-day Vattic, and his firearm-oriented

former self, prevent things from becoming monotonous. Graphics, for the most part, are well done, as is the voice-acting, though the essence of the game is certainly found in the absorbing manner in which the carefully-crafted story is delivered - the game may not be perfect, but for anyone looking for an action title with an engaging storyline, this is just the ticket.

Engaging action title - perhaps too short lived, but definitely entertaining

80



Jackie Chan Adventures



PlayStation 2
Review

Suggested Retail Price: R 469.00 **Developer:** Atomic Planet **Publisher:** SCE
Supplier: Ster Kinekor [011] 445 7900 **Genre:** Adventure **Reviewer:** Walt Pretorius
Requirements: 1 Player · Analog compatible · Vibration compatible

I really love this cartoon show but playing this shameless exploitation of an obviously appealing license leaves me more than a little cold - I may never watch Jackie Chan Adventures on TV again.

To sum the game up in a few words, one would have to put it like this - it's like Tomb Raider with rotten cel shaded graphics, dodgy controls and hideous voice acting. How a title like this makes it past the final Q&A process is utterly beyond me.

The player who expects too much (and

expecting even a mediocre game here falls into that category) is going to be sorely disappointed. Jackie Chan Adventures makes absolutely no attempt to take advantage of even a modicum of the PS2's potential; it's exceptionally ugly to look at, sounds awful and handles like an oil tanker in syrup. Even the younger target market that this game is obviously aimed at will throw up their hands in frustration, alternately crying themselves to sleep and plotting the assassination of Santa for leaving such utter rubbish under the

tree. And the sad thing is that the unethical sods who released this title will be laughing all the way to the bank as a myriad hapless Jackie Chan Adventures fans pull this effluent off of the shelves. If you fall into this trap, don't come crying to me. I warned you.

There is no way to sum up how bad this game is in this little space...

32



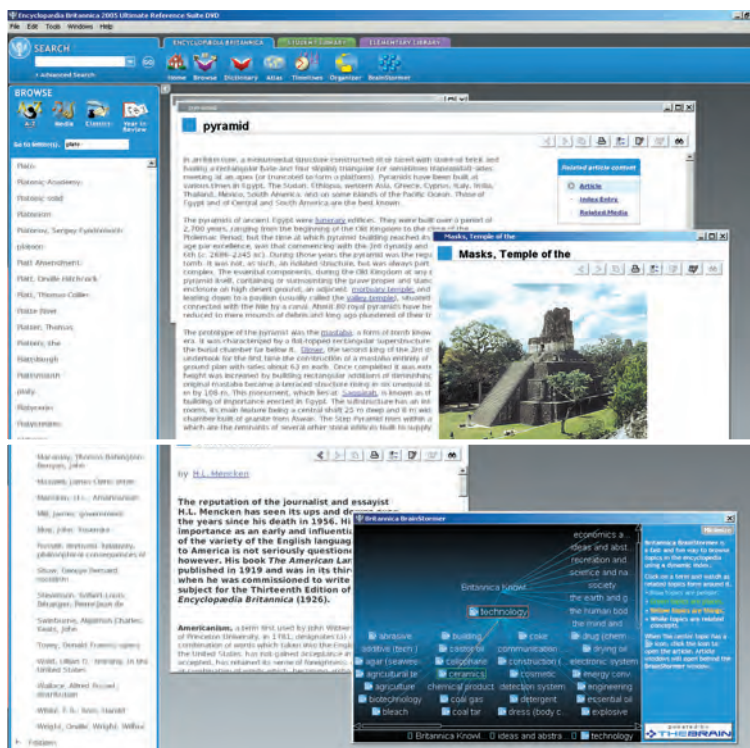
Encyclopedia Britannica 2005 DVD

Suggested Retail Price: R 599 • **Developer:** Encyclopedia Britannica Australia • **Publisher:** Encyclopedia Britannica Australia • **Supplier:** TCM Warehouse [011] 312 1067 • **Genre:** Reference • **Reviewer:** James Francis
Website: www.britannica.com.au

With the growing surge in web-based encyclopedias such as the excellent Wikipedia.com I could lament these knowledge packages as behind the times. But both Encyclopedia Britannica and Microsoft's Encarta series still have certain advantages: they are offline, feature-rich and arguably more researched than online options, though the web has the advantage of far more contributors.

The latest edition in EB's digital collection is a nice package, complete with timelines, videos and photos on a very large range of topics, totalling over 100,000 articles, hundreds of thousands of Thesaurus and dictionary entries and several thousand images and multimedia clips. To compensate for the lack of in-depth articles, you can also search for online references via the software, safely using the library's online engine.

It's a good companion and I found the interface far less cluttered than Encarta's navigator, but unless you opt for the large installation, using the DVD can be very slow and I found the program to be a resource hog. Still, it's a great reference guide for those who can't or prefer not to use the Web for research, plus for the price you're paying it's a steal. Students would benefit a lot from this, so if you're in the market for an encyclopedia, this is a good option. **N**



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Tech Musings: What's a meg worth to you?



words james francis

Today I want to don a beret, slap an armband across my bicep and storm the technology vendors with flags, fervour and cries of bringing down the man. The motivation for the revolution: MP3 players. I've increasingly arrived at the conclusion that there is some serious profiteering happening at the expense of the consumer.

Okay, it's no secret that as a hardware buyer in South Africa you are paying far more than your peers overseas. Some of this can be justified with the cost of imports, taxes and business models, but there's a lot on the shelf that is far over what we should be paying. MP3 players, especially the scourge of knock-off flash drives, are currently at the forefront of this.

A quick search on a local e-commerce site reveals that I can pick up most players with a capacity of 20 - 40GB at between R 3000 and R 5000. Let's take the Ipod as an example. Locally I can buy a 20 GB model for just under R 2,900. That's around 14c a MB. Now, let's say I want to buy an average USB flash drive cum MP3 player. I found a model priced at R925 for 128 MB capacity - a pretty average retail price for something like that. If my calculations hold, that's over R7 a MB.

See the problem? It gets better. A 20GB player usually comes with good software, ample media support and is built around catering for the music fan. A flash drive, on the other hand, caters for the lower end of the market, sporting functional software and usually limiting itself to WMA and MP3 support. I don't have a problem with that, but can someone explain to me how, when you put it down to capacity, we're paying nearly fifty times more for the crappy drives? I can understand that they must be a bit more expensive and that you can't make such a clinical comparison, since there are obviously other factors involved - but a price difference times fifty?

There are some considerations here. Higher capacity players use hard drives, making them cheaper to manufacture than the expensive avenue of flash memory. So I'm not decrying the price, hoping we'll pay the same in comparison for lower-end models. But when you can pick up a high capacity drive of 160 times the capacity at five times the price, isn't there something wrong? I can't in any clear conscience recommend any locally sold low-capacity Flash player because I know it would be an immense waste of money. Even if you never need 20GB of space, could you still justify paying a few increments less for a much smaller drive? I can't, but sadly not enough buyers even know about this vast chasm between models.



Sony Qualia 017 MiniDisc

player

Sony is selling a highly exclusive, upmarket **minidisc player** called the Qualia 017. The company is only manufacturing 15 of these units per month, and the price tag is well in excess of 2000 US dollars (we shudder to think of its price in local currency, hence no conversion!) They are available in silver and gold, with brass body construction, and coated with palladium, which is used in expensive watches and similar jewellery items.

3DMARK⁰⁵



3DMark05 popular among hardware marketers

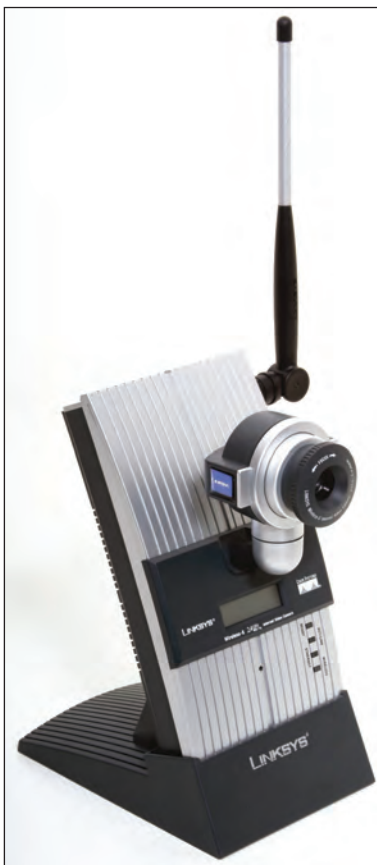
Although it is a synthetic benchmark, Futuremark's 3DMark is a dependable and very popular way to measure gaming performance of computer systems. This fact is demonstrated by the fact that hardware manufacturers have taken to boasting about 3DMark05 scores achieved with their products. Recently, NVIDIA published a score of 7229 attained by the GeForce 6800 Ultra SLI, although the information the company published leaves it unclear as to whether the score was achieved by a single card or a pair in SLI. More recently, Asus decided to blow its own horn regarding the fact that its **A8N-SLI Deluxe motherboard** achieved a record of 10118 3D Marks, barely mentioning the main ingredients in graphical performance - the CPU (AMD Athlon FX55) and graphics card (two NV45 Ultras in SLI). Regardless, it must be admitted that the board does boast some impressive features, including the fact that it can support two PCI Express graphics cards.



Swatch Paparazzi SPOT

SPOT - Smart Personal Object Technology from Microsoft, which makes use of FM radio transmission to broadcast information to small objects such as watches, including weather forecasts, stock market prices and any other such fluctuating information that users may want to be kept apprised of. Now fashion watch manufacturer Swatch has jumped on this bandwagon to bring forth the **Paparazzi SPOT**, a watch featuring the characteristic Swatch styling as well as SPOT functionality. At present, this has little relevance in our local context, as the unit requires MSN Direct presence, which we currently lack, but one can only hope that the situation will eventually change.

www.swatch.com



Linksys Wireless-G Internet Video Camera

This new video camera features a built-in Web-server, so that it can be connected directly to a network (Ethernet or Wireless) without requiring an attached PC. It can be accessed externally, by up to four simultaneous users, via a password protected account by means of a Web browser. It provides a video stream with a resolution of 640x480 and with audio, and can be set to detect motion, at which point it will send an alert and begin recording.



eDimensional 3D Glasses with LCD Screen Support

eDimensional has released a set of stereoscopic 3D glasses that can be used with LCD screens as well as CRT displays. The glasses furthermore support any graphics card.

www.eDimensional.com

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Coolermaster Dual Storm

Coolermaster has released a new type of CPU cooling fan which is designed to address the issue of the hot-spot at the centre of a CPU cooler. This hot-spot results from the fact that it's next to impossible to achieve airflow at the centre of the cooler, which incidentally is its hottest spot. The new Dual Storm makes use of two fans mounted coaxially and spinning in opposite directions, which alters the airflow in such a way that the hot-spot shrinks substantially. The fans spin slower than traditional single fans, thus lowering noise levels somewhat. The package includes a potentiometer for adjusting the fans' speed.

Plug 'n Play

Requiring only two AA batteries, the Plug 'n Play is connected to the AV inputs of a television, allowing you to play a choice of 30 built-in games.

R199.00 | T.C.M. Warehouse
[011] 312 1067
www.tcmwarehouse.com



Thermaltake Tsunami Dream Keyboard & Mouse Combo

This input device combo is fairly ordinary in most regards. The salient features are the keyboard's low profile and expanded array of function keys.

Logitech Cordless Headset for Xbox

This latest gadget from Logitech boasts a range of 30 feet (9 metres) and a battery life of up to 6 hours. It communicates using the 2.4GHz band, which is recognised as being reliable and resistant to interference. Furthermore, the headset packs a noise-cancelling microphone, a good idea in most gaming environments, which tend to be noisy.



Logitech EasyFit Mobile Headsets

Logitech has released a range of corded mobile phone headsets following a "mix-and-match" sort of philosophy. A complete set consists of two, separately available parts - a phone connector and an earpiece part. There are nine of the former available, allowing any of the four of the latter to be connected to virtually any cell-phone currently on the market. As mentioned above, four ear-piece models are available, allowing users to choose the one that suits them best.

Saitek MoHo Range

The peripheral manufacturer has unveiled the Mobile Office, Home Office range of peripherals, which aims at combining style and functionality, predominantly for laptops. Among a full line-up of products, such as a desktop docking station, compact mouse and keyboard and card readers, is Saitek's **Laptop Subwoofer**. This speaker connects via USB (for both audio signal and power) and is compact enough to realistically be carried with a notebook computer.



Legal wrangle over Dual Shock concludes

Immersion Corporation, developer of Force Feedback and similar touch feedback technologies, recently won a lawsuit against Sony with regards to the latter's unlicensed use of Haptic Technology in the form of Dual Shock. The jury ruled that **Dual Shock** infringes the relevant patents, and awarded Immersion \$82 million in damages. Furthermore, it looks like Sony will either have to accept a license, or abandon the technology. The case was originally filed in 2002, against Microsoft and Sony. Microsoft opted to settle out of court (for \$26 million) and went on to become a minority shareholder (about 10%) in Immersion. As for Immersion's future plans, the company has recently entered into a licensing agreement with Samsung, allowing the latter to offer cell-phones with force feedback.



SWISSMEMORY USB Victorinox

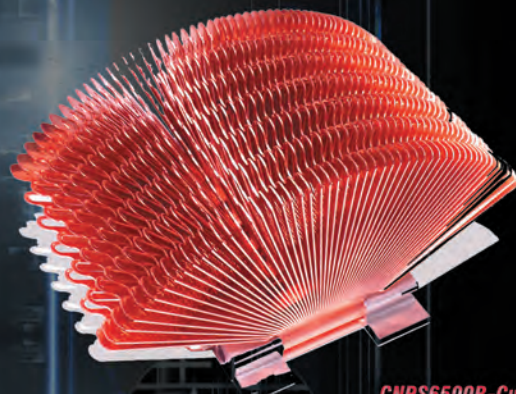
The Swiss Army Knife has always been synonymous with innovative convenience, and this new offering is no different. Victorinox, makers of the definitive Swiss Army Knife, and Swissbit, memory manufacturers, have teamed up to bring a **Swiss Army Knife** with built-in USB Flash drive. Other features include bits that one would expect on the distinctive red utility tool, as well as a pen and LED. The unit is available in two capacities, 64 MB and 128 MB, and is compatible with current desktop operating systems. True to Swiss form, the whole is manufactured to high quality standards.

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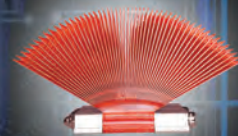
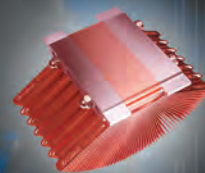
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Tapwave Zodiac²

Supplied by tapwave.com
\$ 399.99

Mobile gaming is in, large bulky consoles that require a massive TV and jungle of cables, is out. Or so the advertising campaigns would have you believe. In a handheld gaming world mostly dominated by the GameBoy Advance, it's always interesting when a newcomer steps up to the plate. While the Tapwave Zodiac is definitely aimed at gamers, it's also a very stylish PDA capable of strenuous office tasks.



As with any portable device, the last thing you'd want is for the screen to get scratched by some passing idiot or flying implement. With a rather stylish protective flip cover, things should work out just fine.

Possibly the most sterling feature of the Zodiac is its 3.8 inch transfective display with a 480x320 resolution and 16 bit colour. It's also backlit, for those who like the dark. The screen can be switched between portrait and landscape modes, depending on what you want to do.



Bundled with the unit, a rugged carry case protects your Zodiac during transport while the high quality ear bud headphones provide access to the audio.



At the top of the unit, two expansion slots allow for the use of SD cards either for extra storage space, or devices such as cameras. The included Bluetooth connectivity makes for easy wireless multiplayer gaming and sharing information with other Bluetooth enabled devices.



On the left sits a variable pressure analogue controller, firmly enforcing the Zodiac's place as a gaming device despite being a rather useful PDA. The controller itself is responsive, though its surface may prove a tad slippery for extended gaming.

The Zodiac packs some processing punch with its 200 MHz ARM9 processor and 128 MB onboard memory, while the ATI Imageon W4200 graphics accelerator with dedicated 8 MB SDRAM allows for some top-notch 3D gaming. Despite running Palm OS, it's the best of PDA meets the best of mobile gaming. As long as developers support the Zodiac, it should have a long and fruitful life.

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Soltek FX5900 graphics card
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RAM

"640K (of memory) ought to be enough for anybody" Bill Gates (1981)

Your system's memory plays a major role in the performance of your computer and many people are not aware of the fact that there is a lot more to memory than simply its speed. One of the most important aspects to keep in mind is the timings of your memory. This month H@rdcOr3 takes a slightly more theoretical approach to the roundup as we put 18 memory modules to the test.

In order to fully understand memory, also known as RAM (Random Access Memory), and all of its complexities I will explain, in brief detail, what memory is and how it works.

In a nutshell, memory can be seen as a very, very, fast temporary storage device. The reason I say temporary is because your computer uses memory to store and access bits of information for limited periods of time. The reason why there is a need for such a component in a computer is because the CPU needs to access information extremely fast and the hard drive is simply not able to deliver that sort of performance. Practically this can be seen when an application is started, let's say Outlook for example. When the Outlook icon is double-clicked, the computer needs to load various files needed to run Outlook into the system memory so that it can be accessed quickly. If this is not done, your CPU would have to wait for the hard drive in order to process a task. This will be a disaster as the hard drive is relatively slow and it might be busy with another task when the CPU needs something. Keeping this in mind it should become clear why more memory is always a good thing, especially if you multi-task often.

A lot of people still get confused over the difference between your hard drive and the system's memory. The Kingston Technology website (www.kingston.com) has a great analogy which explains the difference between the two, *"The file cabinet represents the computer's hard disk, which provides storage for all the files and information you need in your office. When you come in to work, you take out the files you need from storage and put them on your desk for easy access while you work on them. The desk is like memory in the computer: it holds the information and data you need to have handy while you're working."*

Benchmarking

There are only a handful of benchmark applications one can use to accurately test memory and the performance it offers. This month I used SiSoftSandra 2004 SP4 Memory Bandwidth benchmark, PCMark04 Memory benchmark, and Passmark Memory Mark. I ran each benchmark three times (rebooting after each round) to ensure consistency. The DDR memory was benchmarked on my test machine (with a MSI 875P motherboard as the MSI 865 PE NEO2 crashed on me during the benchmarking stages) while the DDRII memory was tested on a computer using a 3.6 GHz Intel Pentium 4 LGA775 CPU, MSI 925X Neo Platinum Edition motherboard, 80 GB Seagate Serial ATA hard drive, and an MSI NVIDIA GeForce

PCX5750 PCI-Express graphics card. The operating system installed on both computers is Windows XP Professional with SP2.

Looking at each review you will notice that after each memory name is a bracket containing either the words "1 GB Kit" or "2 x 256 MB". 1 GB Kit means that the memory comes in Kit form, meaning there are two modules of, say, 512 MB making up the 1 GB Kit. The pricing indicated in the review of the memory in kit form is for both modules. Where it says 2 x 256 MB, for example, it means that the memory is sold individually but I tested two modules (in dual channel mode) and the pricing indicated in these reviews are per module.



Test PC by Light Edge Technology

2 GHz Intel Pentium 4 | MSI 865PE Neo2 motherboard
Transcend Radeon 9700 | Philips 107E 17" Monitor
Transcend 512 MB DDR500 RAM
Western Digital 80 GB HDD 7200rpm
LG DVD/CD-RW combination drive



EMERALD
.....brilliant thinking

Geil Dual-Channel PC3200 [1 GB Kit]

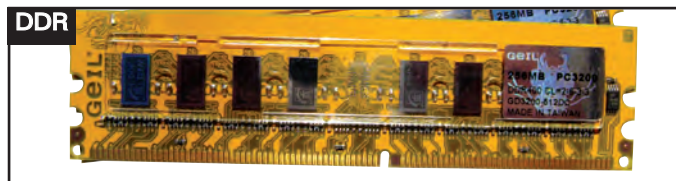
I have a lot of respect for Geil memory and this month my feelings were confirmed. The 1 GB Dual-Channel PC3200 kit consists of two 512 MB sticks which have a CAS Latency of 2.5. Aesthetically these memory modules are quite striking and feature a metallic blue/purple heat-sink which covers all the RAM chips. The performance was very much on par with the rest of the pack and price versus performance ratio was not bad either.

**Performance: 86 Value for Money: 88 Overall: 87**

Plus: Latency **Minus:** Not for basic home use
Supplier: Naked IT [011] 482-5493 **Internet:** www.nakedit.co.za **RRP:** R2159

Geil Dual-Channel PC3200 Golden Dragon [512 MB Kit]

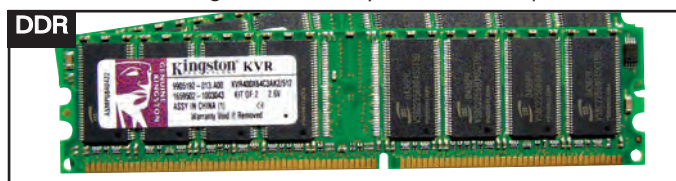
The Dual-Channel PC3200 Golden Dragon memory is another of Geil's masterpieces. The chips on the circuit board are directly mounted on it in its original wafer format and die size. The chips are protected with a translucent plastic cover and there is even a golden dragon sticker in the box which you can use if you wish. Looking at its performance this memory produced benchmark results which were fairly standard across the board.

**Performance: 84 Value for Money: 89 Overall: 86**

Plus: Price versus performance **Minus:** No heat-sinks
Supplier: Naked IT [011] 482-5493 **Internet:** www.nakedit.co.za **RRP:** R1599

Kingston PC3200 Value RAM [512 MB Kit]

Kingston has long been a favourite amongst gamers and over-clocking enthusiasts and with the release of the Value RAM range, it has become more accessible to the masses. The latency of this ram, 3-3-3-8, is reminiscent of value-branded memory but should suffice for most users. Aesthetically there is nothing spectacular about the Kingston PC3200 Value RAM but the performance was impressive for memory in this category. Looking at the benchmark results, this memory performed very much on par with some of the high-end memory in this roundup.

**Performance: 84 Value for Money: 86 Overall: 85**

Plus: Great performance for "value RAM" **Minus:** Latency
Supplier: Axiz [011] 237-7000 **Internet:** www.axiz.co.za **RRP:** R749

Geil Dual-Channel PC4400 [512 MB Kit]

The Geil Dual-Channel PC4400 is on my top 5 list for sexiest RAM of all time. Each of the two memory modules in this kit features a chrome-like heat-sink. On the left corner of each memory module is a heat sensitive sticker which lights up one of the four numbers, indicating the temperature of the memory. The timings are fairly standard for PC4400 and performance wise it was slightly faster than its competitors in the SiSoft Sandra Memory Bandwidth Benchmark.

**Performance: 85 Value for Money: 87 Overall: 86**

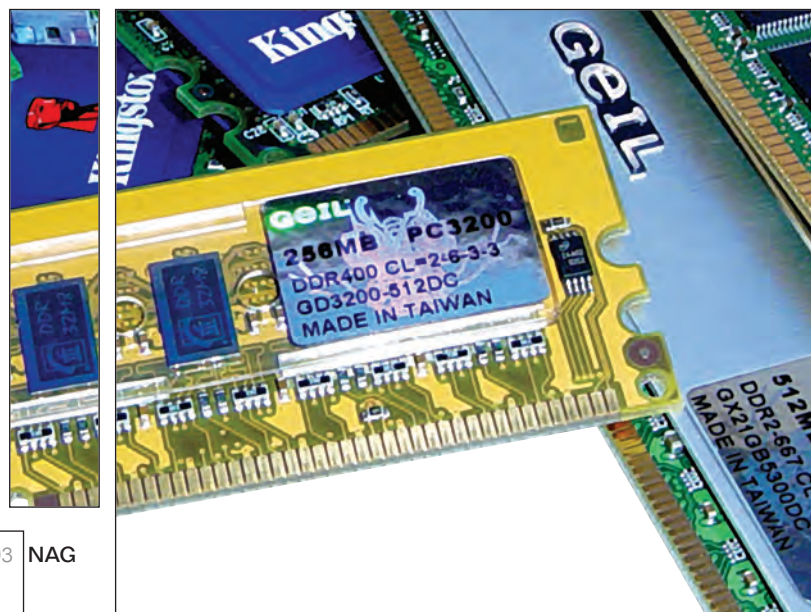
Plus: Looks great | Temperature indicator **Minus:** Memory bandwidth
Supplier: Naked IT [011] 482-5493 **Internet:** www.nakedit.co.za **RRP:** R2099

Memory model numbers decrypted

DDR300 - PC2400	DDR550 - PC4400
DDR333 - PC2700	DDR566 - PC4500
DDR400 - PC3200	
DDR433 - PC3500	DDRII
DDR466 - PC3700	533 MHz - PC2-4300
DDR500 - PC4000	667 MHz - PC2-5300
DDR533 - PC4200	675 MHz - PC2-5400

What to look for in memory

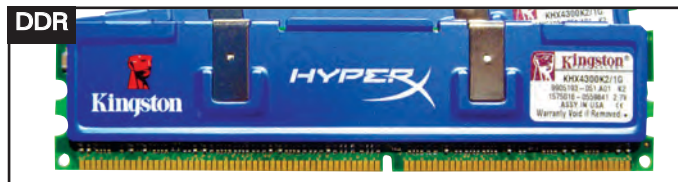
There are two main factors to consider when looking at purchasing memory, the memory clock speed and the latency (timing). The memory we use today is called DDR-SDRAM (but we simply refer to it as DDR RAM) and we have also recently seen the launch of DDRII RAM. DDR stands for Double Data Rate (technical bit coming up) and SDRAM stands for Synchronous Dynamic Random Access Memory. DDR means that the memory transfers data at both the rising and falling edge of the clock (the clock is represented in a wave form which indicates when the voltage rises and when it drops), this as opposed to SDR (Single Data Rate) memory-not to be confused with SDRAM-which only transfers data at the rising edge of the clock.





Kingston PC4300 HyperX [1 GB Kit]

Kingston's PC4300 HyperX memory is the performance memory in their product line-up. There is a hint of this when looking at the memory modules which feature a metallic blue/purple heat-sink. It might be strange that the latency of this memory, 3-4-4-8 is slightly higher than some of the other modules in this roundup but keep in mind that this is DDR533 memory. Performance wise the Kingston PC4300 HyperX performed better than most of its competitors, even if it is just by a hairline.



Performance: 87 Value for Money: 80 Overall: 83

Plus: Performs well Minus: Price
Supplier: Axiz [011] 237-7000 Internet: www.axiz.co.za RRP: R3999

Corsair PC3200 Pro Series [2 x 512 MB]

Upon inspecting the package it is obvious that this is not just any memory. Corsair has really done a great job in presenting memory capable of awesome performance as well as including an innovative set of LED's which indicate memory activity. The latency on this memory is what you would expect from high performance memory and the benchmark results prove it. About the only downside to this memory is its price but if it is performance you are after then look no further.

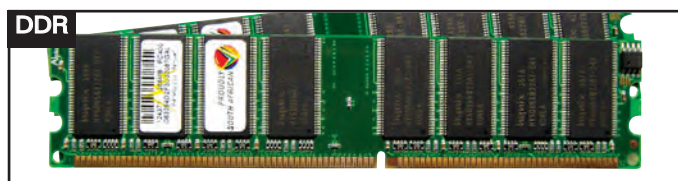


Performance: 89 Value for Money: 91 Overall: 90

Plus: Great performance Minus: Modules are larger than usual
Supplier: Rectron [011] 203-1000 Internet: www.rectron.net RRP: R1199

Alpica DDR400 [2 x 256 MB]

Alpica is a locally manufactured memory and forms part of the value range of memory from Kalliba. The Alpica DDR400 is obviously not aimed at the high end memory market and for basic desktop or workstation use this memory should suffice. Its affordable price also makes it much easier for Joe average to afford. Performance wise it benchmarked significantly slower than some of its competitors but keep in mind this is entry-level memory.

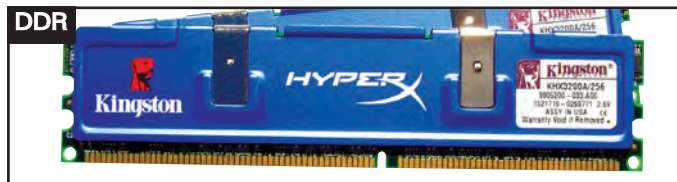


Performance: 70 Value for Money: 78 Overall: 74

Plus: Great for entry-level use Minus: Definitely not for high-end use
Supplier: Axiz [011] 237-7000 Internet: www.axiz.co.za RRP: R490

Kingston PC3200 HyperX [2 x 256 MB]

The Kingston PC3200 HyperX also forms part of Kingston's performance memory line-up although these are not available in kit form which, technically, does not offer the most extreme performance (read the FAQ). These modules look identical to the PC4300 version with the exception that this one runs much slower (DDR400) which helps its latency to be much better. Sadly I was a little disappointed with the benchmark performance of this memory when compared to other brands in the same class.



Performance: 84 Value for Money: 84 Overall: 84

Plus: Low latencies Minus: Performance
Supplier: Axiz [011] 237-7000 Internet: www.axiz.co.za RRP: R899

Clock Speeds

At the moment an array of memory modules are available, as with the CPU, system memory is available in various clock speeds. The most common memory today is referred to as DDR400 but there are also DDR433, DDR466, DDR500, and so on, available. So what does this mean? To explain this I will use the DDR400 memory module as an example. One thing many people do not understand is the speed at which your memory operates.

Intel CPU's have something called a FSB (Front Side Bus). This is a Bus (A Bus is a channel through which data travels in a computer) which connects the memory to the CPU and the motherboard, the FSB is situated in the Northbridge (the chip normally situated just below the CPU with a large heat sink on it). Without going into too much technical detail, Intel's current range of chipsets and CPU's support an 800 MHz FSB (in actual fact it is a quad-pumped 200MHz FSB). DDR400 memory, in turn, operates at 200MHz on the rising edge of the clock and 200MHz on the falling (remember when I explained the Double Data Rate?) equalling to 400MHz. This means that your memory will operate synchronously with your CPU as the memory and FSB operate at the same clock speed. In the case of DDR433 and higher memory, the FSB needs to be over-clocked in order to allow the memory to run at that speed, i.e. to have your memory run at DDR433 the FSB needs to be over-clocked to 216MHz.

AMD systems operate quite a bit differently as opposed to their Intel rivals. Looking at the 64-bit CPU's offered by AMD it is interesting to note that there is no FSB but rather a technology called HyperTransport. In a nutshell, current AMD 64-bit systems do not have a NorthBridge and the memory controller is situated on the CPU itself. This HyperTransport runs at 800MHz which means that it will run DDR400 memory by default.

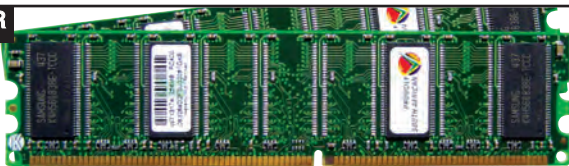
DDRII

There is not much difference in the architecture between DDRII and normal DDR RAM. Bar one or two core enhancements the biggest improvement found in DDRII is the increase in clock speed, which in turn, leads to an increase in memory bandwidth. It is important to note that DDRII RAM is still in its infant stages and currently only continues where DDR RAM stopped. In the next couple of months (even years) we will see DDRII RAM with core clocks of 800MHz and faster which is when DDRII memory will show what it is capable of. The one negative aspect of DDRII is the increase in latency - you should notice in the specification table that all of the DDRII RAM latencies are in the area of 4-4-4-12. This is mostly due to the increase in clock rating but we will soon see this change when the technology gets improved.

Kalliba DDR400 [2 x 256 MB]

Kalliba is also a locally manufactured memory but it offers slightly better performance as it is the flagship brand in its range. Even though this is the case I would rate it as a mid-range memory in comparison to the other brands in this roundup. I was impressed to see that this memory has a latency of 2.5-3-3-8. Its memory bandwidth performance was not superb but its rating on the other two benchmarks was on par with its competitors.

DDR



Performance: 84

Value for Money: 85

Overall: 84

Plus: Latencies Minus: Memory bandwidth benchmark
Supplier: Axiz [011] 237-7000 Internet: www.axiz.co.za RRP: R539

Transcend DDR400 [2 x 256 MB]

Transcend has been in the memory industry for ages and even though they have never really had memory which shattered records, the performance rating of the mid-to-high-end range of memory offers great value for money. Transcend DDR400 features a low latency while its performance is on par with some of the other "performance" memory in this roundup. Considering its price this memory is perfect for gamers wanting performance memory on a tight budget.

DDR



Performance: 86

Value for Money: 89

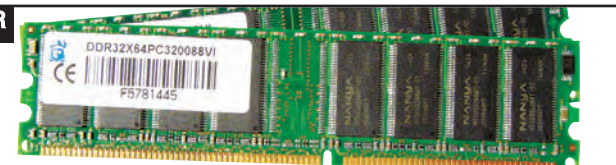
Overall: 87

Plus: Value for money Minus: Nothing
Supplier: Rectron [011] 203-1000 Internet: www.rectron.net RRP: R399

Viking DDR400 [2 x 256 MB]

For a seemingly unknown brand in South Africa, this offering from Viking really impressed me. What I liked about this memory is not that it outperformed any of its competitors but that it performed on par with some of the heavy weights in this round up. I would have really been impressed if it offered a low latency but its 3-3-3-8 is normal for memory of this calibre. Its estimated retail price is not mind blowing but when it comes down in price this memory will definitely make an impact on the market.

DDR



Performance: 84

Value for Money: 84

Overall: 84

Plus: Performance on par with heavy weights Minus: Price
Supplier: Light Edge Technology [021] 510-8270 Internet: www.lightedge.co.za RRP: R430

Latency

This explanation may get a little technical as it covers the latency of memory. The one thing to bear in mind is that data in the memory is stored in columns and rows.

I am sure most of you have seen a series of numbers when looking at the specifications for a specific memory module. These numbers usually look like this: 2.5-2-2-5. Each number represents a specific feature, these are, in order: CAS-tRCD-tRP-tRAS.

The first one, CAS, stands for Column Address Strobe. The CAS latency is measured in clock cycles and is usually 2, 2.5, or 3. This is the most important of the lot as it represents the time (in clock cycles) from when the CPU requests data, to when the DDR RAM releases it. The quicker this happens the faster your computer can execute commands. Ideally you want a memory module which is CAS2, but CAS2.5 is also acceptable. When you start getting to CAS3 you should seriously look for another memory module if you want the best performance for your system. DDRII memory is still only available in higher CAS latencies and it is rated at much higher frequencies.

Next on the list is tRCD which stands for RAS-to-CAS delay. The RAS(Row Access Strobe)-to-CAS delay is the time (in clock cycles) between finding the row and the column of a specific piece of data in the memory which needs to be written to or retrieved. Even though this value is higher than the CAS value it does not have such a big impact on the memory performance.

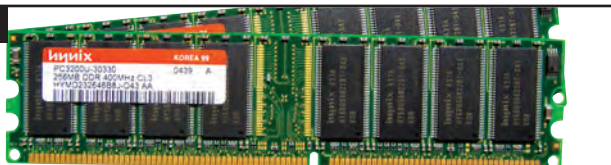
The third number is the tRP which stands for RAS Precharge - this is simply the time (in clock cycles) it takes for the memory to stop accessing the row it is working on and start accessing another. This value is very similar to the tRCD and usually ranges between three and five cycles. The tRP is also tricky to modify in that if the value is too little it will cause system instability as it will not have enough time to return the data it is working with to the memory bank before switching to another row, you will also experience system instability if you modify the tRP and the application you are working on makes use of large memory blocks that span over several rows.

The last value, tRAS, stands for Active to Precharge Delay. This is the time (in clock cycles) it takes for the memory to receive a signal and execute a RAS - this is usually a high value.

Hynix DDR400 [2 x 256 MB]

Hynix is a well known memory chip and OEM memory manufacturer - some might even say that Hynix chips are of the best in the world. It was thus with a lot of enthusiasm that I benchmarked this offering from Sahara. Looking at the memory Bandwidth benchmark I was a little disappointed with the performance offered but the benchmark results are on par with the other DDR400 memory. The latency of 3-3-3-8 is also not ideal for high-end users but looking at its price this memory is aimed squarely at entry-level to mid-range usage.

DDR



Performance: 84

Value for Money: 82

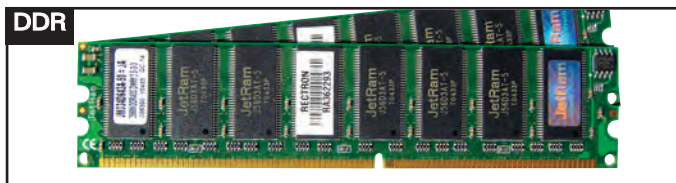
Overall: 83

Plus: Price Minus: Latency
Supplier: Sahara [011] 542-1000 Internet: www.sahara.co.za RRP: R350



JetRam DDR400 [2 x 256 MB]

JetRam is the "value-range" of memory that Rectron stocks and even though that is its target market, this memory performs well enough to be considered for mid-range use as well. I was impressed with the latency of this memory, 2.5-3-3-8 and also the benchmark results compared to some of the other, more expensive, memory in this roundup. Looking at its price this memory is definitely worth considering if you do not use your computer for high-end tasks or if you do not over-clock it.

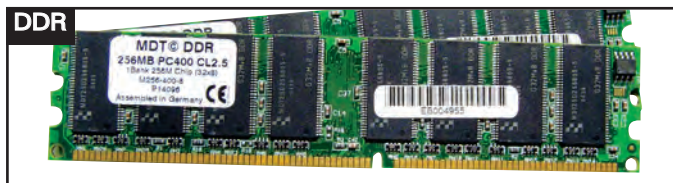


Performance: 85 Value for Money: 85 Overall: 85

Plus: Latency **Minus:** Not for high-end use
Supplier: Rectron [011] 203-1000 **Internet:** www.rectron.net **RRP:** R369

MDT DDR400 [2 x 256 MB]

MDT is another fairly new brand to our shores. Looking at its price one would think that this is entry-level memory with not much performance power. I am happy to report that this memory offers the best value for money out of the entire roundup. Granted the fact that I will not recommend it to over-clocking enthusiasts, normal users will be more than happy with its performance.



Performance: 86 Value for Money: 85 Overall: 85

Plus: Price **Minus:** Not for over-clocking
Supplier: Eurobyte [011] 234-0142 **Internet:** www.eurobyte.co.za **RRP:** R299

Geil Dual-Channel PC2-5300 [1 GB Kit]

As with the other Geil memory in this roundup, the Dual-Channel PC2-5300 looks really great. In fact it is one of the very few DDRII memory modules I have seen with a heat-sink - this one features a brushed aluminium finish. Even though the latency for DDRII memory is traditionally high (see introduction) Geil still managed to produce memory capable of out performing most of its competitors. Impressively this particular memory beat its competitors in each benchmark application hands down.



Performance: 89 Value for Money: 81 Overall: 85

Plus: Performance **Minus:** Price
Supplier: Naked IT [011] 482-5493 **Internet:** www.nakedit.co.za **RRP:** R3799

Geil Dual-Channel PC2-4300 [1 GB Kit]

Aesthetically, the Geil Dual-Channel PC2-4300 looks identical to its higher clocked brother. This one also features the brushed aluminium finish. While its latency is the same as the other DDRII memory in this roundup I was a little disappointed not to see any major performance increases over its competitors. Considering its price the Geil Dual-Channel PC2-4300 kit is still very expensive and I foresee only serious computer users buying it at this point in time.

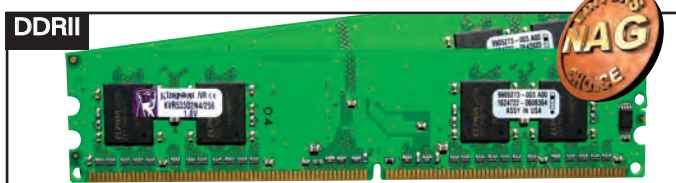


Performance: 87 Value for Money: 79 Overall: 83

Plus: Looks awesome **Minus:** Price
Supplier: Naked IT [011] 482-5493 **Internet:** www.nakedit.co.za **RRP:** R3399

Kingston Dual-Channel PC2-4200 [2 x 256 MB]

Following in the tradition of its great performing memory comes the DDRII memory which operates at DDR533. As mentioned before, the latencies are all roughly the same on DDRII, which, even though it is high, still allows for this memory to perform pretty well. As was expected, the performance on the Kingston Dual-Channel PC2-4200 memory is still pretty much on par with its competitors, and its estimated retail price, as it is the cheapest in this roundup, gives it the edge when it comes to value for money.

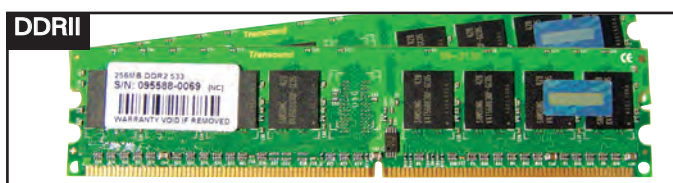


Performance: 87 Value for Money: 90 Overall: 88

Plus: Price **Minus:** Nothing
Supplier: Axiz [011] 237-7000 **Internet:** www.axiz.co.za **RRP:** R699

Transcend PC2-4200 [2 x 256 MB]

This DDRII offering from Transcend is another DDRII memory module which offers performance that is on par with the rest of its class. The operating frequency of this memory is 533 MHz which should suffice for current DDRII motherboards, except of course if you want to squeeze every bit of juice from your system, then PC2-4200 would be the way to go. The Transcend Dual-Channel PC2-4200 is, sadly, also a bit more expensive than some of its counterparts that offer virtually the same benchmark performance.



Performance: 87 Value for Money: 85 Overall: 86

Plus: Memory bandwidth performance **Minus:** Price
Supplier: Light Edge Technology [021] 510-8270 **Internet:** www.lightedge.co.za **RRP:** R999



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Corsair Value Select PC2-4300 [2 x 256 MB]

This Corsair memory is branded under the company's Value Select range but there is nothing of "value" quality about this memory. In fact if you look at the benchmark results you will notice that this memory achieved the highest benchmark results for each of the benchmark tests except for the memory SiSoft Sandra Memory Bandwidth benchmark. The latency is rated at 4-4-4-12 which is standard for DDRII memory at the moment and the price is not bad either.



Performance: 87 **Value for Money: 89** **Overall: 88**

Plus: Slightly better performance than the rest **Minus:** Nothing
Supplier: Rectron [011] 203-1000 **Internet:** www.rectron.net **RRP:** R799

FAQ

Q: How much memory do I need?

A: As a rule of thumb I recommend at least 256 MB but 512 MB is highly recommended. This also depends on your operating system. If you still use Windows 98 you should be shot, but if you do you can get away with 128 MB of memory. Windows XP, for example, can just get by with 128 MB while you would need 256 MB to really see a performance improvement.

Q: What memory should I buy?

A: This really depends on what your motherboard can handle, DDR400 is currently the standard but it is always a good idea to buy a decent brand with decent latency timings. Certain brands also over-clock much better so it is a good idea to search the Internet for user reviews if you want to over-clock your memory. Also check the motherboard manufacturer's website to see if the memory you want to buy is compatible with your motherboard.

Q: Can I mix different memory?

A: Yes and no. You cannot mix, say, DDR and DDRII memory but you can technically mix DDR400 and DDR500 memory on one motherboard. This is obviously not ideal as the DDR500 memory will always run slower to stay on par with the slower memory. This is also not ideal for dual channel setups as memory in dual channels need to be the same brand and same model in order to work effectively.

Q: What is the difference between a Dual-Memory Kit and two separate sticks of the same memory?

A: Dual-Memory Kits consist of memory that has been manufactured directly after each other on the production line. This type of memory is usually more expensive but you are guaranteed optimal performance in dual channel mode as the two modules that make up the kit are virtually identical (because they were manufactured directly after one another).

Product	SiSoft Sandra Memory bandwidth	PCMark04 Memory benchmark	Passmark Memory Mark	Timings	Price	Rating
DDR						
Geil Dual-Channel PC3200 (1 GB Kit)	Int: 4471 Float 4449	4633	557.7	2.5-8-4-4	R 2,159	87
Geil Dual-Channel PC4400 (512 MB Kit)	Int: 4303 Float 4385	4505	556.1	3-8-4-4	R 2,099	86
Geil Dual-Channel PC3200 Golden Dragon (512 MB Kit)	Int: 4464 Float 4514	4564	547.7	2-6-3-3	R 1,599	86
Kingston PC3200 Value RAM (512 MB Kit)	Int: 4453 Float 4478	4592	559	3-3-3-8	R 749	85
Kingston PC4300 HyperX (1 GB Kit)	Int: 4472 Float 4468	4626	563.1	3-4-4-8	R 3,999	83
Kingston PC3200 HyperX (2 X 256 MB)	Int: 4411 Float 4486	4460	541	2-3-2-6	R 899	84
Corsair PC3200 Pro Series (2 x 512 MB)	Int: 4599 Float 4532	4964	560.1	2.5-3-3-8	R 1,199	90
Alpica DDR400 (2 x 256 MB)	Int: 4310 Float 4318	4142	531	3-3-3-8	R 490	78
Kalliba DDR400 (2 x 256 MB)	Int: 4298 Float 4394	4527	558.9	2.5-3-3-8	R 539	84
Transcend DDR400 (2 x 256 MB)	Int: 4463 Float 4482	4599	552	2.5-3-3-8	R 399	87
Viking DDR400 (2 x 256 MB)	Int: 4449 Float 4513	4562	549.8	3-3-3-8	R 430	84
Hynix DDR400 (2 x 256 MB)	Int: 4290 Float 4351	4543	557.9	3-3-3-8	R 350	83
JetRam DDR400 (2 x 256 MB)	Int: 4440 Float 4488	4612	551.9	2.5-3-3-8	R 369	85
MDT DDR400 (2 x 256 MB)	Int: 4449 Float 4511	4609	560	2.5-3-3-8	R 299	85
DDRII						
Geil Dual-Channel PC2-5300 (1 GB Kit)	Int: 4708 Float 4707	5446	542	4-4-4-12	R 3,799	85
Geil Dual-Channel PC2-4300 (1 GB Kit)	Int: 4639 Float 4641	5333	541.4	4-4-4-12	R 3,399	83
Kingston PC2-4200 (2 x 256 MB)	Int: 4644 Float 4643	5343	542.4	4-4-4-12	R 699	88
Trancend PC2-4200 (2 x 256 MB)	Int: 4669 Float 4662	5338	541.6	4-4-4-11	R 999	86
Corsair Value Select PC2-4200 (2 x 256 MB)	Int: 4659 Float 4648	5351	542.7	4-4-4-12	R 799	88

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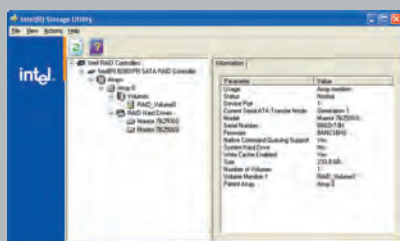


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Native Command Queuing

The hard drive as we know it today is the only component which still makes use of legacy electronics and is a major bottleneck in the performance of today's computers. But with a new technology called Native Command Queuing (NCQ) we will soon be finding this "smart" technology in all of our hard drives.



Intel's Application Accelerator is needed to be able to make use of NCQ. The motherboard's BIOS also needs to have this feature enabled and in most cases you will need to reinstall Windows to if you plan to upgrade to this technology.

Tagged Command Queuing

Command Queuing isn't a new technology. SCSI drives have used the technology for a while now in the form of Tagged Command Queuing. In this case data requests get tagged when they arrive at the buffer and the SCSI host controller arranges the requests according to the tags to ensure the hard drive moves the smallest distances necessary to get to the required data. Unlike the SATA version, this is mostly handled by the controller card and not by the drive itself.

Hard drives are actually very archaic devices. The traditional hard drive design has not changed much since its appearance way back in 1956 from an IBM laboratory, consisting of several layers of magnetically sensitive platters that spin around. An actuator arm moves up and down the surfaces of these spinning discs, changing the magnetic charges, thus writing data. Even as drives progressed, all that has been changed is the density of the data, the number of platters and how fast these platters spin and arms move. Even Serial ATA (SATA) only manages more speed by handling the data transfer to and from the drive, but the basic mechanics still remain the same. In fact, a hard drive is not a very clever piece of hardware at all; it basically does what it is told, writing bits of information to its platters (platters are the shiny discs inside a hard drive on which all of your information is stored). In fact, to get a bit technical, these platters consist of multiple tracks and each track consists of a cluster. Each cluster consists of sectors and this is where your information gets stored - now you know exactly what it means when Microsoft's Scandisk tells you that your hard disk has bad sectors. Information is written to these disks, magnetically, via the actuator arm which has a head that is situated a couple of molecules from the platter surface.

In a working environment the hard drive receives its orders from the chipset's I/O (Input/Output) controller. The information that needs to be written to the disk is first stored in the hard disk's buffer and then written to the disk itself. This is where the problem arises: when the I/O controller sends information to be written to the hard drive, the drive will write the information to the platter in the order it receives it, no matter where on the platter this information is placed; this process always occurs from the outside in. Even though the hard drive will always know exactly where your information is, getting to it quickly enough is a big concern. The reason for this is that the actuator arm can only move up and down over the platter while it spins, thus information will be placed randomly in the various sectors available. It's also the reason why it is a good idea to defrag your hard drive as the defrag process moves the sectors around and stores them in a logical place, thus making data retrieval faster.

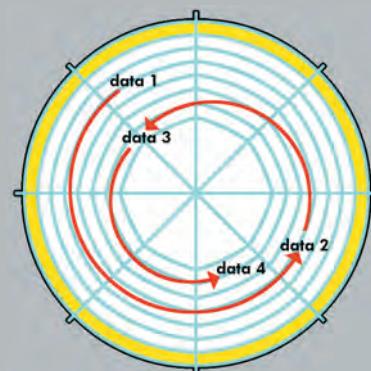
The speed of the hard drive is measured in rpm (revolution per minute); today's hard drives are available in 5400 rpm, 7200 rpm, and 10 000 rpm. The reason why a 10 000 rpm drive is speedier than its two counterparts is because the platters spin faster and are able to get to the information a lot quicker, but this isn't really a solution. The hard drive is requested to get the data which consists of four sectors (A,

B, C, and D). Traditionally a hard drive would get sector A, spin around, get sector B, spin around, get sector C, and finally spin around again and get sector D. This process takes quite a bit of time, even though it is merely milliseconds, because a lot of time is really wasted. We should also take into consideration that a hard drive does not just consist of one platter but on average four to six making the wait for each bit of information slightly longer as all the actuator arms move in synchronization with each other.

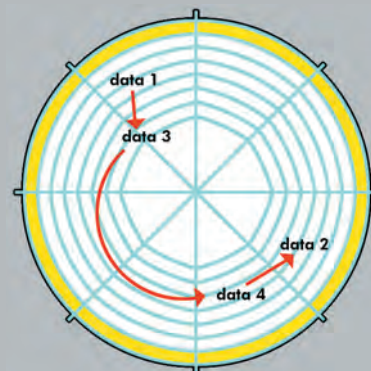
So how does NCQ help? SATA did bring the ability to process data much faster, giving way for a new breed of technology inside the drive – the one place where things haven't changed much in the past half century. Native Command Queuing operates inside the drive and is handled by the drive, so instead of simply taking orders, hardware with NCQ support do things their way. When data is requested from the hard drive, it lines up the commands as it gets them. So if your file is distributed over several segments on the discs, the drive would spin through the plate, collecting the data not as they become available but as the program requested them. So if the first and third part is on the first segment and your second part is on the third, the drive would collect the first part, go to the third segment, get the second part and then spin around to the first segment again to retrieve part three. This obviously makes no sense – it's like driving to the store three times to get bread, milk and eggs individually. Even if part three was on the segment before part two, it would be ignored until part two has been collected and only get retrieved on the next cycle.

NCQ allows the hard drive to decide when to collect what, in the most efficient way possible. When the commands arrive to collect or write data, the drive will determine where the data is located and reshuffle the commands in its buffer for the most efficient route through the drive. That means that if Part 3 is located before part 2 on the drive, it gets queued before that part and thus gets retrieved first, saving an entire spin.

This might sound very minute, especially when you consider an average drive does several thousand revolutions per minute and to most the advantage of doing things this way won't be obvious, except under situations where the hard drive gets accessed frequently. NCQ is also still relatively unsupported. At the moment it is only Intel's latest 925 (Alderwood) and 915 (Grantsdale) chipsets that boast support for this new technology natively, while the Silicon Image 3124 is a controller card which is also compatible with NCQ. Users also need to run Intel's Application Accelerator to make use of the technology. But in terms of hard drive evolution it's a big deal and we'll definitely start seeing the advantage of the technology as hardware becomes faster and more demanding. So in terms of a giant leap forward, don't expect NCQ to change how you do things, but instead as one of those quiet technology revolutions that no-one notices but nobody will be able to do without in a few years. ■

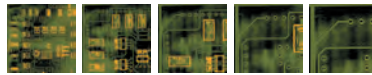


Without NCQ, the hard drive has to wait for the actuator arm to be at the right place at the right time in order to get the information requested.



NCQ allows the hard drive to get the information from the sectors as the actuator arm passes over it.





HIS Excalibur X800XTPE VIVO 256MB IceQII PCIe

I was very excited when the HIS Excalibur X800XTPE VIVO 256MB IceQII PCIe, the first in the country, arrived on my desk. There has been much hype in recent months over PCI-Express and the products we will see that makes use of this technology and one of the questions that I wanted answered was whether the PCI-Express version would outperform the AGP version of the ATI X800XT PE graphics card. Looking a little closer at the card itself it is obvious that this is an HIS graphics card simply by looking at the oversized heat sink. This large heat sink forms part of HIS's IceQII technology which allows the card to run cooler by sucking air directly from the outside of the case over the GPU. This technology works surprisingly well but I was unable to replicate the 11-degree drop in temperature that HIS claims in my test environment (with and without water-cooling). The oversized heat sink takes up two PCI brackets at the back of the case (one for the connectors and one for the air vent) and I foresee a slight problem with this on certain LGA775 motherboards. Some motherboard manufacturers place the PCI-Express X1 slots directly below the PCI-Express X16 (the graphics slot). This was the case on the MSI motherboard I tested this month and the obvious problem is that with a card such as the HIS Excalibur X800XTPE VIVO 256MB IceQII PCIe which has an oversized heat sink the first PCI-Express slot will be unusable.

Seeing that this is the X800XT PE (Platinum Edition) the core and memory clock speeds are slightly higher than that of non-PE edition cards. This card features a core clock of 520 MHz while the memory clock is 1120 MHz. It also features 256 MB GDDRIII 256-bit memory. The Excalibur X800XTPE VIVO 256MB IceQII PCIe also features ATI Rage Theatre VIVO (Video-In, Video-Out) this means that you will be able to connect this card to your TV or HDTV. You will also be able to plug a video source into it to record from that external source.

In benchmarking this card I made use of both the Intel 925XCV and MSI 925X Neo motherboards. Both features 1 GB of Micron DDRII memory and an 80 GB Seagate 7200 rpm hard drive. The CPU I used for both setups was a Pentium 4 Processor 560

(3.6 GHz). I ran each of the benchmarks three times to ensure consistency and just for fun I ran the same benchmarks on an AGP version of the ATI X800XT PE. This test machine consisted of an MSI 875P Neo motherboard with 1 GB DDR400 Transcend memory as well as an 80 GB Seagate 7200 rpm hard drive. The CPU used with this test machine was a 3.4 GHz Pentium 4 Prescott. It goes without saying that I used Windows XP Professional SP2 and the 4.10 ATI Catalyst drivers. Obviously the specifications of both machines are not the same and thus the results cannot accurately depict the performance difference between the AGP and PCI-Express versions of these cards. The first benchmark I ran was 3DMark05 build 1.1.0, the PCI-Express card achieved a result of 6279 while the AGP card got 6098. Moving onto Aquamark3 the results were also somewhat surprising, the PCI-Express card achieved 7363 and the AGP card achieved 7206.

These results were quite surprising and were not exactly what I expected. Looking at the serial nature of the PCI express technology and the increased bandwidth that it offers, I was really hoping to see much faster performance than what the benchmark results showed here. Granted the fact that today's benchmark applications, games, and software cannot fully utilize the features that PCI-Express has to offer today, I was really hoping that the new LGA775 chipset, DDRII RAM and myriad of other technological improvements would make this card much faster than its AGP counterpart. Don't get me wrong, the HIS Excalibur X800XTPE VIVO 256MB IceQII PCIe is an awesome piece of hardware and is obviously the ultimate solution in conjunction with DDRII and a socket 775 CPU. As with all new technologies it will be a short while still before we see the performance gains we hope to get out of PCI-Express and soon we will see hardware and software designed exclusively with PCI-Express in mind. When this happens, AGP will be counting its last days.

Plus: Very fast
Minus: Does not runaway from its AGP counterpart | These cards are scarce

Supplier: Café Viva [021] 683 6789
Internet: www.hisdigital.com

RRP: R5500
Reviewer: Tom Taylor



Sapphire X700 XT 128 MB

PCI-Express is without a doubt the next generation graphics bus, but in these early phases of its adoption nothing about the offerings available on this interface has really impressed me, from any of the major players. We were fortunate enough to be the first SA publication to get hold of an X700 XT to find out if ATi had achieved its goal of creating a PCI-e offering to slot neatly between the sad X600 and the rampant X800 series, as the numbering indicates, delivering performance broadly similar to its bigger brethren at a mid range price point.

This particular Sapphire model features a core clock of 475 MHz with 128 MB of memory running at 1.05 GHz. The GPU itself is an evolution of the R423 used in X800 cards called the RV410, and one of the most important elements of this scaling-down is a memory bus now only 128 bits wide. The number of vertex pipelines remains the same at 6, while the die itself shrinks to the 110nm TSMC process. And there are only 8 pixel shader pipes...

3DMark 03 and 05 both indicate that this creation is a success. With scores of 8478 and 3069 in each benchmark respectively, the latest offering claims a position squarely in between the older 9800 and X800 models. In

fact, it looks like playing more on the X800 side of the field, an excellent result for its price. Benchmarks were carried out using the latest Catalyst driver series available, 4.10.

By leaving all 6 vertex pipelines intact, ATi has delivered a GPU with great geometry processing capabilities, which seems to deliver the most benefit at the standard resolution of 1024 X 768. Start cranking the resolution up to 1600 X 1200 though, and introducing post-processing effects like FSAA or Anisotropic filtering, and the X700 does start to struggle in most applications due to the limitations imposed on memory bandwidth by that smaller bus mentioned earlier. The X700 does deliver an excellent performance if kept to the standard resolution, at an attractive price point. Its high-end performance degradation does place it below the NVidia 6600 GT offering on comparative tests on the Web, which might mar its appeal slightly, but it still offers excellent bang for the buck. If you've just shelled out for a new PCI-e system and need a graphics board to fit what's left of your budget, try and stretch to this level as lower-priced offerings won't satisfy the discerning gamer.

Plus:	Practically high-end performance at 1024 X 768
Minus:	Loses out at higher resolutions and with FSAA or AF turned on

Supplier:	Sapphire
Internet:	www.sapphiretech.com

RRP:	TBA
Reviewer:	Russell Bennett



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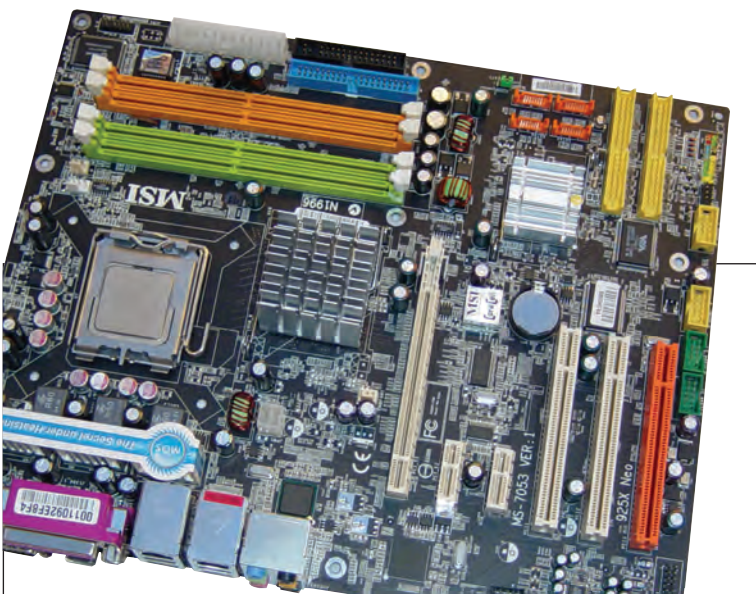


MSI 925X Neo Platinum

The MSI 925X Neo Platinum is by far one of the best LGA775 motherboards I have seen to date. It is not necessarily the fastest kid on the block but its features, compatibility with an array of hardware, and in this one's case, the bundled memory (yeah you read right) makes this one of the most desirable motherboards of the year. The MSI 925X Neo Platinum features all the specifications of a regular LGA775 motherboard such as three PCI-Express slots (two PCIe X1 and one PCIe X16). It also features two IDE ports and four Serial ATA ports both of which feature a VIA RAID controller. A feature which is not critical but very handy for enthusiasts is dual-Ethernet ports. The MSI 925X Neo Platinum has one Broadcom Gigabit LAN port and one Intel 10/100 MBps Ethernet port. It also has the Azalia onboard 8-channel audio as well as an SPDIF-Out optical and coaxial audio port.

As I mentioned before, this model comes bundled with two sticks of Samsung 256 MB DDRII 533 MHz RAM. This is a superb move on MSI's behalf as almost no one will have spare DDRII RAM lying around and buying it separately could be a costly affair (see the H@rdc0r3 Roundup). Performance wise this motherboard did not perform too badly. The test bed consisted of an Intel Pentium 4 Processor 560 (3.6 GHz) with the Samsung 256 MB DDRII memory that is bundled with it, set up in Dual Channel mode, as well as the MSI RX600XT graphics card. To put the results into perspective I used exactly the same hardware on an Intel 925XCV motherboard. The first benchmark I ran was Aquamark3 the MSI motherboard achieved a score of 29 915 while the Intel motherboard got 29 180. Futuremark's PCMark04 produced a result of 5612 on the MSI motherboard, while it produced a result of 5409 on the Intel motherboard. The PassMark Performance Test V.5 produced a score of 485.6 on the MSI setup while it only produced a score of 455.6 on the Intel motherboard.

There is very little to find fault with this motherboard, its bundle is the first thing that comes to mind, it lacks some quality applications but the bundled memory more than made up for that. This is not the fastest motherboard around but if it is quality and hardware compatibility you are after then look no further.



Plus: Bundled RAM
Minus: Bundled software

Supplier: Light Edge Technology [021] 510 8270
Internet: www.lightedge.co.za

RRP: R2500
Reviewer: Tom Taylor

Hardcano 13

The head unit of the Hardcano 13 itself looks very much like a modern, digital display car radio complete with digital controls arranged in a circular pattern on the left with the right-hand side dedicated to the large LCD display itself. You are able to plug four



system fans of your choice (I did my CPU, graphics card, and two external case fans) into the device, as well as place four thermal sensors included in the package on any components you'd like to monitor the temperature of. The fans thus connected can now be RPM controlled via the buttons on the front panel. Temperature sensor readouts are displayed on the LCD screen, and you can scroll through the different sensors using the same digital buttons. As long as you connect the connector on the Hardcano to the USB headers on your motherboard, there's the ability to read and write to all the major memory-card formats in use today. It even comes with a built-in throwback to practicality in the form of the card reader.

Plus: Hardcore techie style
Minus: Makes the innards of your system very messy

Supplier: Corex [011] 707 5000
Internet: www.corex.co.za

RRP: R695
Reviewer: Russell Bennett

Motorola V620

No improvements have been made to the standard Motorola interface since the V600, or at all for that matter.

While the interface is functional, it has a certain level of unresponsiveness and clutter that could annoy some. Unrelated to the interface itself, one of the first problems of the V620 is the keypad. Often, key presses aren't registered and can result in numbers and messages being irritably retyped. On the flip side, the rest of the phone is reasonable and actually very sleek once one gets used to its flaws. The VGA camera had a slightly higher fidelity than the usual fare, although its ability to capture video might as well have been left out. The quality for video was simply too low and the internal memory not sufficient for it to be useful. Black has always been a fashionable colour, the V620 makes full use of that concept with its smooth black clamshell design, sporting some well-placed silver trimmings. A cell phone sleeve/case is recommended however, due to the size and placement of the screen contributing to easy scratches and smudges, not to mention the smaller LCD info display on the top of the cell phone is just as prone to being defaced accidentally without one.



Plus: Stylish | Functional
Minus: Motorola's interface | Dodgy keypad responsiveness

Supplier: Motorola SA [0860] 10 10 39
Internet: www.motorola.co.za

RRP: TBA
Reviewer: Miktar Dracon

Rio Karma 20 GB

The packaging for the Karma proudly proclaims that it takes up to 20,000 songs. If you read the fine print, they mean around 20,000 MP3s, encoded at 128 KBs. That is, of course, a ballpark figure derived from assuming that each song is about 2 minutes long, so don't go by that math. Still, the 20 GB capacity is authentic and significantly more than most people have in their music collection. It also means that the Rio Karma fits snugly in the high-end portable player market, alongside the likes of the IRiver Jukebox and Apple Ipod.

All in all, it's not a bad player. In fact, it's quite an impressive one and the Karma's only shortcomings seem to be of a design nature. The unit ships with a cradle that can double as an alternative audio output (it has two audio jacks at the back that can be connected to a sound system), plus it supplies power to recharge the batteries and the means to connect to your PC. Like similar models you also don't need the cradle, as the supplied power and USB cables can plug into the unit directly. You can also connect the cradle to a network, allowing it to be accessed by anyone on the LAN as a network device.

The music transfers can be done via Media Player or the Karma's own software, including Gracenote's CDDB support. On the unit itself the software is adequate, easily navigating through artists, songs, albums and genres. It's not as flexible or expansive as the Ipod's, though, and building a custom play list is a bit more intensive than it should be. Outside most of the controls are handled by a small analogue button that you tip to the selection you want. This is accompanied by a menu button, volume controls and a rotating switch at the top that allows you to skip forwards and backwards through a song.

The Karma's interface problems are more evident with the lock button, which also manages to lock your volume controls. This might not have mattered if Rio bundled a second controller attached to the headphones, but there's nothing like that supplied. Overall it's a good player with good sound and decent features at a decent price. The small problems still sway me towards Apple's models, but the Karma follows a close second and it definitely is worth considering if you need a decent, high-capacity player.



Plus: Good sound | Solid design | Nice cradle features
Minus: Interface needs work | No remote on the headphone cable

Supplier: WWE [011] 462 0150
Internet: www.rioaudio.com

RRP: R3499
Reviewer: James Francis

PC CD-ROM

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against
the axis of evil



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Acecad DigiMemo A501

If you've ever had to endure lengthy meetings, you'll know all about taking notes and then later having to either scan them or re-type them so that they can be e-mailed to those who attended. The DigiMemo is an interesting step towards removing all the pain out of taking notes, by intelligently recording everything you write on paper that is clipped to the unit. There is nothing special about the paper itself, but rather the specialized pen starts recording what you write/draw as you press it against the paper. One has to press slightly harder than normal however, so you might find some text not recorded until you get used to the pressure required to activate recording. The back 'clipboard' unit takes a few AA batteries (included) and can store roughly 40 pages of writing, transferable to the PC via supplied USB cable. Initially some driver issues plagued this process however, but repeated reinstalls eventually solved the problem. The fidelity of the recording mechanism is reasonably high, perfect for people with clear printed letters and non-sketchy diagrams. If a lot of writing/drawing has been captured, the amount of available pages starts to decline due to memory constraints. The inclusion of CF card support lets you expand the internal 8MB storage space and store up to 999 pages if you have a large enough CF card. Extra pen 'nibs' are included in the package for when the initial ink runs out. Overall the DigiMemo is a functional device that does what it sets out to do perfectly and, if used in the right circumstances, can save a lot of time. It will be interesting to see how future iterations of the technology are applied.

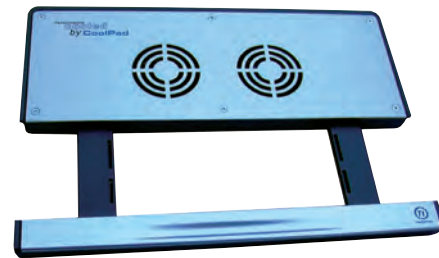


Plus: Functional | Useful during meetings
Minus: Driver issues | Could be more sensitive

Supplier: Frontosa IT [011] 468 4724
Internet: www.frontosa.co.za

RRP: R920
Reviewer: Miktar Dracon

Thermaltake CoolPad



With the recent rise in temperature, a colleague of mine whose laptop had been running without any hassles whatsoever during the colder months suddenly began experiencing peculiar shutdowns and general instability.

Excessive heat on the CPU was quickly diagnosed, a mildly faulty fan being the cause which had passed unnoticed when the air itself was a few degrees cooler.

Fortunately cooling specialists Thermaltake have this market covered, with the CoolPad on test here designed to keep notebooks well within safe operating temperatures. Similar to a base station, the CoolPad's major feature is the aluminium plate on which the underside of the notebook rests complete with dual built-in fans to keep the metal itself chilled. Power for the DC fans is usefully provided through the USB connector, which is nice, and the CoolPad does offer four additional USB ports for the loss of this one. And it works. Perhaps not as efficiently as a directly attached cooler on a desktop CPU for instance, but well enough to drop your notebooks operating temperature by a good 4 - 5 degrees C, enough to ensure your laptop remains cool even in the heat of an SA summer day.

Plus: Extendable to suit most any sized laptop
Minus: Difficult to carry around with your laptop

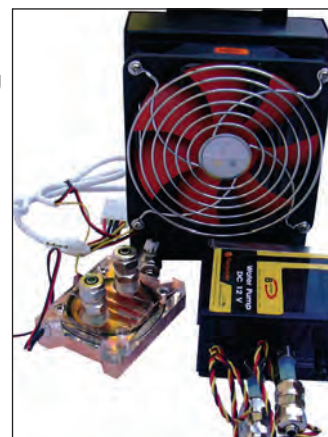
Supplier: Corex [011] 707 5000
Internet: www.corex.co.za

RRP: R595
Reviewer: Russell Bennett

Thermaltake Big Water 12cm Cooling System

I've always shied away from liquid cooling solutions, so when it came to testing the Thermaltake BigWater 12cm liquid cooler I approached the task with some trepidation. And it was not misplaced...

Let me just begin with its effectiveness as a CPU cooler. It works, very well in truth. Temperatures were sent plummeting, on an Athlon XP platform down to a maximum of 38 degrees C under load, from a far more worrying 72 with the standard cooler in place. Oddly however, XP got very concerned about the health of my CPU at this temperature, as the CPU fan reports a 0 RPM failure once it's replaced by the BigWater... Installing the BigWater is not quite as fraught as I expected, although filling the coolant reservoir in the pump itself can be a tense affair. It's no quieter than today's after market coolers, more perilous to your hardware, and not really that much more effective a cooling solution.



Plus: Keeps system cool | Looks cooler
Minus: Complexity and risk

Supplier: Corex [011] 707 5000
Internet: www.corex.co.za

RRP: R1295
Reviewer: Russell Bennett

Jazz Home Theatre 5.1 Silver

5.1 is slowly becoming pretty standard - it's hard to find medium to high-end sound systems that don't support this audio technology. In other words, you'll have to buy a set of speakers with 5.1 support eventually. Most products at the top of the market, though, go beyond 5.1, sporting even higher specs than you'd need. The Jazz Home Theatre set sticks to the conventions of 5.1, but it seems to miss the boat almost everywhere else. For one, this is pure 5.1, so if you do not have any support for the technology - i.e. enough sound ports to handle the three cables - then it won't work on your machine. Granted, it still plays sound, but pretty badly. Once in 5, the sound improves, but not by a lot. The mid-range seems to be the victim here as it's barely audible next to the high range and bass lines. Still, it's not terrible, just not great. The Jazz loses points more over its design.



There's no support for people who want to hook up their headsets and a lack of RCA jack support means you can't wire the set into a DVD player or other non-PC equipment. It's not a bad speaker set, but it's far from great and only if you want a slightly elaborate setup for your PC without paying or expecting a lot.

Plus: Good bass | Supports 5.1
Minus: No RCA or headset support | Average sound

Supplier: Corex [011] 707 5000
Internet: www.corex.co.za

RRP: R890
Reviewer: James Francis

BTC Dual Layer 16x Writer

DVD is here to stay, especially since the retail sector for DVD movies grew nearly 170% in the past year. The fact is that we all need higher-density mediums and until Flash memory becomes cheap enough to be more practical, we have the high-density world of DVD. So it's no surprise to see a lot of companies diversify into this market, including expert keyboard maker BTC.

This 16x Double Layer drive is able to write very high-capacity discs of over 8 GB at 16x speed. It also supports DVD-RW at 8x and CD-R and CD-RW at 48x and 24x respectively. Inside the box you'll find two alternative faces for your drive, Nero Burner and the Cyberlink DVD software. Sadly unlike its competitors BTC didn't opt to put blank discs in as well.

As a bundle it isn't a bad

deal, but the writer is slower than other models, both in reading and writing. It takes quite a bit of time to write a DVD, but the CD writing is top notch. The main reason to get this would be for writing double layer DVDs, but once again the drive is slower than other options. It's not the best drive on the market, but it doesn't do a bad job at all - the 16x Writer is simply not as fast as its peers. This might be BTC still finding their feet in the market and I doubt most users will notice it, but the speeds will annoy more experienced writer users.



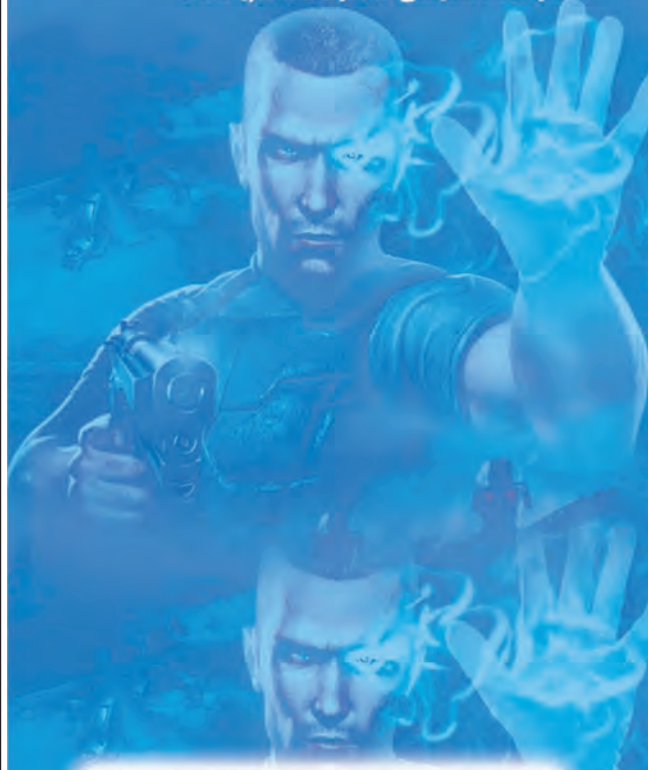
Plus: Wide media support | Good software bundle
Minus: Not very fast | No blank media included

Supplier: Corex [011] 707 5000
Internet: www.corex.co.za

RRP: R995
Reviewer: James Francis

PC CD-ROM

PSI-OPS
THE MINDGATE CONSPIRACY



PC CD-ROM

PSI-OPS
THE MINDGATE CONSPIRACY



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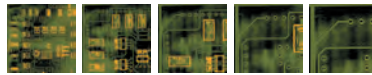
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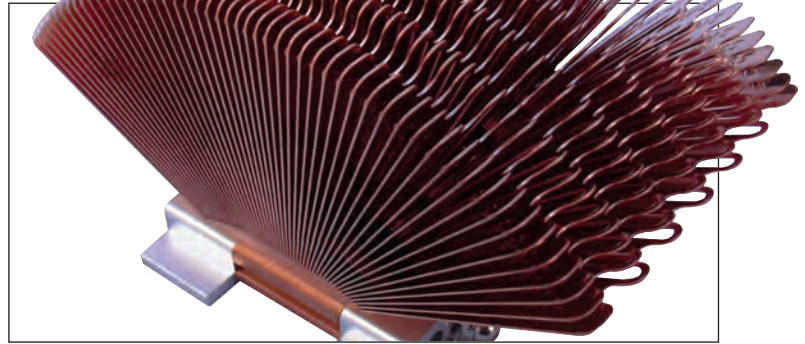
Zalman CNPS6500B-Cu

The Zalman CNPS6500B-Cu CPU cooler claims to offer good cooling performance at the lowest possible noise levels without actually reverting to a passive system and coping with the lower cooling abilities which such a fan-less design implies.

The shape of this cooler is quite remarkable. It is also called a flower cooler due to the visual impact of the 52 copper fins, splayed out from their meeting point at the CPU plate itself like a standard deck of playing cards. This arrangement makes the Zalman rather deceptive. It looks substantial, but not overly large, yet the significant amount of copper which has gone into the wafer-thin fins themselves, and of course the very well machined copper base, result in a hefty weight approaching 900 grams. Installing the heat sink portion of the cooler itself is delightfully simple, as the flower can quite obviously only be mounted in one way. The fan, attached

to the top of the outspread fins via a vibration-eliminating fan housing and clip combination, can be slightly trickier but not a major hassle. After that, it's simply a case of connecting the 92mm cooling fan, which inci-

dentally is large enough to provide cooling air not only for the CPU but the motherboard chipset as well, to the included Fan Mate 1 speed-adjusting rheostat and settling back to enjoy the benefits of the CNPS (Computer Noise Prevention System) solution. With the unit in silent the Zalman is eerily quiet. However, at this lagged RPM even all that copper surface area struggles slightly to match a standard P4 cooler. Jack the



speed up to maximum, and the temperature reading falls considerably, but noise levels increase accordingly, eliminating this products major selling point. From purely a cooling perspective, the Zalman is an excellent solution. Silent mode is capable of keeping your CPU within safe temperature limits should but any over-clocking or hardcore gaming will require that you switch the unit into its normal mode of operation.

Plus: Looks good | Can be either near-silent or an effective cooler
Minus: Not ideal for over-clocking or gaming in silent mode

Supplier: Frontosa [011] 468 4724
Internet: www.frontosa.co.za

RRP: R480
Reviewer: Russell Bennett

Asus DRW-1604P

Ha! I just finished writing almost 8 GB of data (8000 MB to be exact) out to optical media without having to change disks once, and in just over 27 minutes...

This is the latest Asus offering in the optical storage arena, and the above fact is its biggest headline. It's a 16X16 dual-mode DVD burner which can also use the latest, Double Layer (DL) DVD format at an astonishing 4X data rate. And yet you sort of have to wonder what the point of this latest format is really? Particularly when the same drive takes under 7 minutes to write one ordinary single-layer disk. Say it takes 4 minutes to set up the new compilation and start the second disk writing, that's 18 minutes for 8 GB as opposed to 27 for a single DL disk...and you'll pay about a tenth for both blank single-layer disks than the one DL media, although of course adoption and demand will rapidly send these prices south.

This Asus drive is an optical storage won-



der. Multi-format capability means it can write to most any form of optical media available today, at the highest possible speeds. That DL writing time cannot be matched on the market today. In addition it claims to be able to write most brands of 8X DVD R at 16X. Although the ones I tried didn't manage this feat, if you stuck to the certified labels on the Asus website you'd probably have better luck in this respect. There are also advanced features such as FlextraLink which is basically buffer overrun protection on DVDs, and FlextraSpeed which varies the speed of burning depending on the media. It's

the DDSS-II which is actually noticeable though. Standing for Double Dynamic Suspension System, this technology is claimed to lessen vibration while stabilising the optical pick-up head for more precise tracking, and while I can't confirm or deny this, what it does succeed in doing is actually making the drive vibrate less.

The Asus DRW-1604P is the fastest DL writer currently available and among the fastest DVD and CD writers. However I'm still not convinced by the value of the DL format as yet...

Plus: Headline 4X DL write speed
Minus: DL still immature | Media prices are too high | Even at this speed burning is too slow

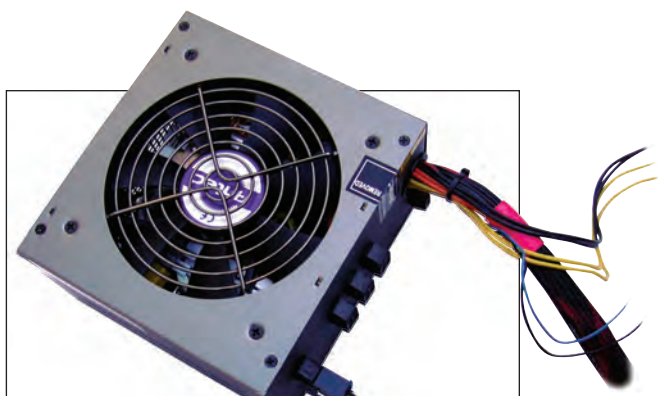
Supplier: ASUS [011] 783 5450
Internet: www.asus.com

RRP: R895
Reviewer: Russell Bennett

Antec NeoPower 480W modular PSU

With the Neopower 480 W PSU, manufacturers Antec have really come up with something special. In fact, one could say that this is the type of product which revolutionises the mundane, in this case the power supply of your PC.

It's not the fact that this is the first Antec offering to feature ActivePFC which makes the NeoPower so very appealing. Nor is it the compliance with ATX 12V v2.0 standards, which it's claimed can reduce power consumption by up to 25%. And while the inclusion of an RPM-adjustable, 120 mm fan in the PSU casing itself keeps noise levels down to appreciably quieter than standard, this isn't the big deal either. The NeoPower 480 features an entirely modular cabling system, which provides not only an innovative approach to cable management and clutter, but one which also works absolutely brilliantly. The first of its



kind, but something which makes such an impact as to beg the question "Why has this not always been the way to build a PSU?" Only the main 26-pin ATX power cabling, sheathed in a mesh sleeve, PSU fan connector and 4-pin 12V connector are actually attached to the unit. The remainder of your devices are catered for with an extensive array of cables, included in the box, which you simply plug on to the connectors on the PSU itself as and when you require them. The 3 cables dedicated to Molex connectors feature yet another cable-management innovation in that one of them is significantly shorter than the other two, allowing you to use it to connect drives in the 5 1/4 inch bays without creating too much messy spaghetti effect. There are also two cables dedicated to SATA, and one exclusively for powering high-end PCI-Express graphics cards. With dual 12V rails providing the power, this Antec unit also delivers highly reliable voltages for maximum system stability, although the voltage was perhaps not quite as strong as I'd initially expected.

Nonetheless, this product has got to get a highly recommended from me. Excellent PSU performance, low noise, and a flawless solution to in-case power cable management. It's exactly what system builders and enthusiastic case modders have wanted for years.

Plus:	Modular cabling system
Minus:	Gunmetal grey finish scratches easily

Supplier:	Frontosa IT [011] 468 4724
Internet:	www.frontosa.co.za

RRP:	R1399
Reviewer:	Russell Bennett

Soltek Qbic EQ-3901

This is no underpowered pseudo-PC destined to play DVDs its whole life onto a TV screen... no this Soltek Qbic EQ-3901 is actually a serious gaming device with the added advantage of easy portability.

In its all-silver casing, the Qbic looks fantastic, and the central round power button lights up blue when the system is turned on for some additional bling. Optical drives are hidden behind the integrated silver covers, and flaps cover up the front-panel audio and USB connectors. It might be small, but this Qbic packs a punch. The EQ-3901 series is built on Solteks own SL-B9d-FGR



motherboard utilising the Via K8T800 Pro chipset supporting AMD socket 939 Athlon 64 processors. This particular example had an AMD 64 3400+ stuffed into it, with 512 MB of dual-channel DDR 400 RAM. Plugged into the AGP slot is a Soltek FX5900 graphics card, with enough performance to satisfy all but the most graphics-intensive gamer. There's one more PCI slot standing open, as absolutely everything else your mini LAN box could need is integrated onto the board itself. There's 8-channel audio hardware, USB, Firewire, and a Gigabit LAN adaptor. In 3DMark03, this combination delivers a very respectable 6243 in 1024 X 768 with both FSAA and AF disabled. The more modern and shader-intensive 3DMark05 awards the system 1948 points, a pretty respectable score in itself. All of this gaming hardware is being kept alight by a tiny, 300W PSU while a Soltek-branded case cooling solution affixed to the inside of the box keeps the system cool even under load.

I've been looking around for one of these miniature, stylised systems with true gaming potential for a while now and in the Soltek Qbic have finally found just that. It's a great little product, particularly useful for anyone who moves around to different LANs on a regular basis.

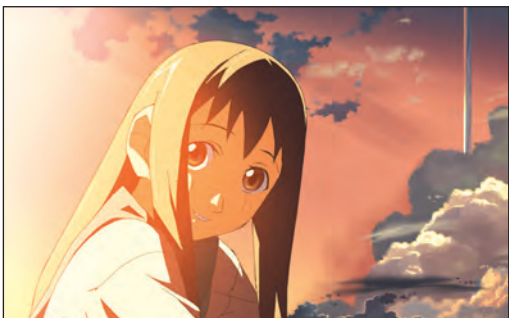
Plus:	Athlon 64 makes this a powerful little box
Minus:	FX5900 a bit noisy

Supplier:	Eurobyte [011] 234 0142
Internet:	www.eurobyte.co.za

RRP:	R8399
Reviewer:	Russell Bennett

news

bits and pieces



After Makoto Shinkai's much-applauded 2002 debut, entitled "Voices of a Distant Star", details have now been released concerning his latest feature production - "Kumo

no Mukou, Yakusoku no Basho" (or The Place Promised in our Early Days).

The film deals with an alternative present-day Japan, where most of the country is controlled by either U.S.S.R. or U.S. forces.

While Shinkai's name may be relatively unknown to a large portion of the western anime audience, his work is gathering increasing repute in Japan. Kumo no Mukou is being heralded by many industry professionals as the latest visual breakthrough in Japanese animation. The excitement is mainly due to new techniques in integrating 2D and 3D animation, as well as Shinkai's astounding attention to detail which puts him (at least, in this reporter's opinion) comfortably in the league of Studio Ghibli and GAINAX. The official trailers can be downloaded at

www.kumonomukou.com/trailer.html.

The release of the film, however, has been marked by problems and politics, and negotiations are still underway as to which company will distribute it. This leaves the film's exact release date uncertain, but the crisis is expected to be resolved before November, when Shinkai intends to hold the Japanese premier. Hopefully, we will see an official English release in early 2005.

review

grave of the fireflies

While western cinema is obsessed with historical war movies, there are surprisingly few in anime. One such film, and certainly the defining film of its genre, is **Grave of the Fireflies**. Written and directed by Isao Takahata (a colleague of the great Hayao Miyazaki at Studio Ghibli), it focuses not on the soldiers, unlike many war films, but on the civilians who suffer as a result. Towards the end of World War II, a teenage boy and his younger sister are left to fend for themselves when their mother is killed during the bombings of Tokyo. The film traces their attempts to survive: trying to find a place to stay, food to eat and clothes to wear; as well as their attempts to find happiness in the wreckage of their lives.

Grave of the Fireflies is a tragic movie that will reduce many audiences to tears. It follows a character-oriented plot, and is less dependent

on action than many other films dealing with the same subject matter. As such, younger, more "modern" viewers may find it too slow paced, and since the storyline does not obey the expected conventions (exposition, mounting action, climax) some may see it as inconclusive. However, it would be a mistake to disregard the film for these reasons, as its emotional realism is almost unsurpassed in the history of the medium. In addition to this, the animation is spectacular, in true Studio Ghibli style, and the soundtrack is a masterpiece that every music aficionado should have in his or her collection. You may walk away from this film feeling deeply depressed, but that will not take away from the pleasure of having just watched one of the greatest war stories ever told.

Format: Movie Age Restriction: PG 10
Availability: www.amazon.com - \$23.99 excl. shipping



music.

Green Day are back after quite a long absence with an album that is certainly better than their last attempt, but still not of the quality that propelled the band to fame. It starts out well enough, but slows down to a calm, even sedate, album, although still full of venom...



American Idiot
Green Day

Resident Evil: Apocalypse
Various Artists

Just as the second film is taking flack, the new sound track also does not live up to the previous one. It has some rare tracks that collectors might be keen on, but on the whole, this collection of songs leaves little to be desired, even if you are into the heavy stuff.



This double CD, compiled by DJ Spiro, features some of the best progressive house around. While the first CD is entertaining, the second truly shines as it takes on a slightly darker mood than the first. There are also some big names featured on this very worthwhile disk set.



Progression
Various Artists

King Arthur
Hans Zimmer

This original film score is an impressive and moving collection of songs that are far better than the movie they were featured in. Hans Zimmer is one of the instrumental masters of Hollywood, and those who enjoy good film scores should certainly give this a listen.



books.

Shared Fantasy: Role-Playing Games as Social Worlds

By Gary Alan Fine

Price: R297.95 (excl. delivery)

Before video games became the target of parental and religious groups due to their perceived controversial content, it was role-playing games that bore the brunt of these attacks. In Shared Fantasy, US sociology professor Gary Alan Fine decided to immerse himself in several role-playing systems and examine the sociological aspects of a hobby that is still popular today. Consisting of eight chapters, Fine examines everything from the nature of fantasy role-playing gaming right through to the reality of the fantasy and the game structure and its effect on participants. While the study was published in the early eighties at a time when role-playing was just gathering momentum, many of the conclusions he makes are as valid today as then. In many ways, this time period succeeds in



Videogames is to computer and console gaming what Shared Fantasy is to role-playing gaming. Written by UK university lecturer James Newman, Videogames provides the reader with an introductory guide that examines the history of video gaming, its development and the possibilities it has for the future.

In keeping with the topic, Newman has attempted to write a book that is as easily accessible to the general public as it is to humanities students. He starts by examining why it is necessary to study videogames. The chapters quickly pick up the pace as he moves towards what gaming is and the development issues behind creating games. Perhaps two of the more interesting chapters are the ones discussing narrative and play and the culture of video games. As one would expect, Newman's arguments make sense from an academic perspective. Unfortunately, there are times

giving the reader valuable insight into what playing in those formative years must have been like. Many things have obviously changed in the intervening years. This is especially true when it comes to the nature of the gamers. Where Fine portrays many of the gamers as close-knit and highly critical, modern players are more open-minded towards new players and actively seek out to "spread the gospel."

If fantasy role-playing interests you, then Shared Fantasy will definitely give you more than a few wonderful anecdotes to show the positive (and negative) aspects of this hobby. It combines humour with academic writing to make for a very insightful read that is definitely worth your time even if it may seem a bit dated.

where he loses touch with what gamers actually want from a title. This becomes apparent with his argument that the use of cut-scenes should be eliminated as it restricts the involvement of a player. This does seem logical, but most gamers would be able to explain to Newman the value of a carefully placed and well-designed movie. In many ways, these cut-scenes pull a player even more into the gaming world. Newman also touches on important issues such as the rise of the female gamer and how interaction between the player and the game should be measured. All told, Videogames is an interesting, if not particularly critical, analysis of video games.

Videogames

By James Newman

Price: R170.83 (excl. delivery)

books supplied by

role-playing.

dungeons & dragons v3.5

The first printing of the new and improved (and completely revamped) Dungeons & Dragons Third edition rules happened back in 2000. But as time passed these rules were modified, changed and enhanced by players around the world - and Wizards of the Coast, unlike their TSR predecessors, paid careful attention to what was going on.

By gathering information from a wide variety of sources, the developers of this new version of D&D managed to streamline the rules system, add new items and options, and generally make the game a lot better than it was before.

This, of course, means that the entire D20 system has also changed - but before the collective groan of role-players around the world gets too deafening, rest assured that these changes do not exclude previously published material.

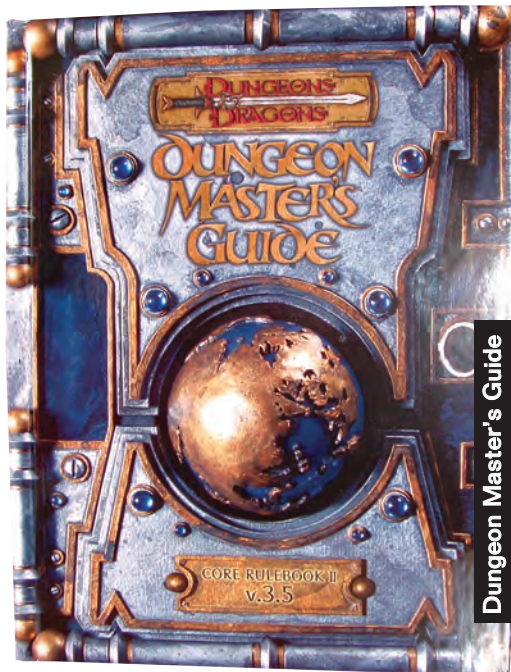
Games and source books that came out based on the v3.0 rules are still useable with this new system, although a few minor adjustments need to be made by the game master. Wizards of the Coast certainly have taken a different approach with this role playing flag ship when compared with TSR. They are keeping the game current and fresh, and giving players what they want, all packaged in attractive books that are well worth the money.

Of course, the matter of needing to buy three new books to take advantage of the improvements made to Dungeons & Dragons, as well as the D20 system, is a bit of a pain, but those that want to keep their gaming experience as enjoyable as possible will undoubtedly make a plan to get their hands on these beautiful and useful books.

What's new in the **Player's Handbook**? You'll find a larger number of spells and feats, as well as new class features added to the barbarian, bard, druid, monk, ranger and sorcerer character classes, as well as an overhaul to the skills and spells within.



Player's Handbook
Approx. R275



Dungeon Master's Guide
Approx. R275

What's new in the **Dungeon Master's Guide**? Encounter tables and magic item creation rules have been revised. Movement rules have been expanded on. New prestige classes, new magical items and magic item special abilities have also been thrown in.



Monster Manual
Approx. R275

What's new in the **Monster Manual**? New monsters have been added, most importantly, and existing monsters have been reorganised for ease of use. A monster ability glossary has been added, as well as new monster feats and comprehensive rules for advancing, customising and designing monsters. Advanced versions of certain monsters (to make them more challenging to higher level characters) have also been added.



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comics.

School Bites
Broadsword Comics
R123.95



This is a very odd series for lovers of things Goth, Manga and Cute. Charlotte Webb was the sweet girl who went to a bad party, and woke up a vampire. At first she's a little uncertain of how to deal with this turn of events, but then a friendly bat drops off an invitation to the (un)hallowed halls of the Shadow academy - the place where all kinds of vampires (you did know there were several kinds, didn't you?) get trained to face the world as blood drinking creatures of the night. Of course there is the big bad guy, who wants to destroy the school, and worse than that, the girls have to wear school uniforms. The horror, the fun, the outlandish Goth humour... read it!

Smallville
DC Comics
R29.95



For those of you who have not yet encountered the Smallville series on television, this is a series about the life of the young Clark Kent, later to grow up and become Superman. In the comic book you will find extra stories about the characters in the TV series. There are also interviews with the cast and crew, as well as news on upcoming events in the series. For those that like the pretty pictures there are plenty of photos to stick on your wall. If you don't know the series from TV, don't worry, everything will be explained in this comic, or at least, enough to make you add another dose of television addiction to your life.

Bullseye, Greatest Hits
Marvel Comics
R23.50



Bullseye, the man who never misses, has been caught. Unfortunately, the nuclear missiles he stole before the alleged brain tumour that caused his collapse and capture, are still missing. Two NSA agents are brought into one of the most secret complexes in the world; their mission is to find out what has happened to the missiles, and how to stop them going off. One of the agents is a master of getting information out of people. His suggestion to break down the target is to catch him off guard. As a result the agents ask their prisoner about everything but the weapons. Here the reader will get a good picture of what it takes to twist the human mind, and turn an innocent boy into a killer of deadly accuracy, with no morals at all.



Paradise Kiss
TokyoPop
R85.95

Punk, fashion and Manga all combine in a single comic book. The story revolves around Yukari, a young girl in a good school, trying to get good grades so she can get into a decent college, as her parents expect. Her life is turned upside down when she meets the Kids from the local fashion arts school. They have a show coming up and they need someone to model for them. As Yukari tries to decide whether to help them out she also has to decide whether to do what is expected, or should she try living her own life and doing what she wants.

graphic novel

This is the comic writing debut of John Cleese, of Monty Python fame. The story assumes that just before the destruction of the planet Krypton a space ship is sent off to the planet earth. Unlike the story we normally know, this baby lands on the Island of Britain. Adopted by a good English family, the boy now known as Colin Clark is taught to remember the basic tenant of British life: "what would the neighbours think?" All his life he is taught that to stand out from the crowd is bad, so he hides his powers as he becomes a journalist for the trashy tabloid, the "Daily Smear". See superheroes and superpowers as only the British could make them, not a great gift, but an embarrassing social secret.

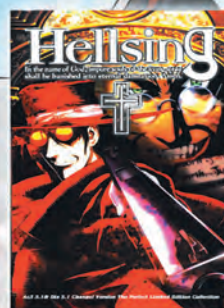
Superman True Brit
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board games.

memoir '44

Strategy titles are very popular on the PC, as we all know - but board game variants are also popular... look at titles like Risk and even chess for proof. However, most have very simple rules that cover the strategic side of things with very broad strokes. Not so with Memoir '44.

This game has a rather hefty rule manual that covers just about any possible situation that can occur on the board, and includes several histori-

cally based World War 2 scenarios for you to choose from.

It is intense and precise play, and the player needs to keep his wits about him to win the game.

The entire thing is wonderfully finished, with detailed playing pieces, clear cards and a sturdy feel.

If you enjoy your board games a little more cerebral than just moving around a track buying streets, this is one for you to consider.

Memoir '44
Approx. R509 (incl. shipping)



ticket to ride

Ticket to Ride is a simple and fun title that is described as a cross-country train adventure. Points are earned (and moves made) by collecting various cards and winning races across America in the 1900's. Yes, that's right, no dice in sight when you play this one!

The true beauty of this game is that it is so incredibly simple to learn, yet

offers the player a huge amount by way of entertainment.

The product is sturdy and well finished, with more than enough play pieces to make your board journey complete and then some.

By the way, we just thought we'd mention that Ticket to Ride won the much coveted German Spiel des Jahres (Game of the Year) for the year 2004.

Ticket to Ride
Approx. R419 (incl. shipping)



Supplied by www.boardgames.co.za

strategy guides.



Covering all 3 platforms on which X-Men Legends is found (Xbox, PlayStation 2 and GameCube); the Bradygames Official Strategy Guide contains, unsurprisingly, everything about the game and then some. The comprehensive walkthrough of every single mission is augmented by detailed personnel profiles and various extras such as Equipment listings and tips on where to find each bit of extra content that can be unlocked. Notes about additional points of interest throughout the game end off an already well-rounded guide.

Available from Pearson Education at
itminds@pearsoned.co.za



It would be quite impossible to list everything that this guide covers on The Sims 2. Every single aspect about the game is analyzed and explained in comprehensive detail across 350+ detailed pages. Completely full-colour pages sport charts, tables and object listings while expert strategies help keep your Sims happy, from generation to generation.

For the long-term types, a large chapter is dedicated to building long-lasting Sim dynasties, while the more creative out there will enjoy the sections dedicated to Custom Content, The Body Shop and the Create-A-Sim mode. With a breezy beginners guide and quick reference to Sim Lifestages, you won't need any other guides.

Available from Kalahari.net at
www.kalahari.net

SID MEIER'S PIRATES!



NOVEMBER 2004



ATARI



The new Sid Meier's Pirates! carries on with the great play dynamic and design simplicity tradition of the award-winning original while adding more challenging and exciting battle options, and a deeper and more varied role-playing experience, including multiple paths to a wealthy, happy retirement. This and many other features and additions make this gaming classic one of the most highly anticipated releases of this century!



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The Star Wars Databank

www.starwars.com/databank/

Love it or hate it, Star Wars is a pretty rich Sci-fi soap opera, full of hairy monsters, incest and crazy men roaming the desert. But it can be hard keeping track of all of these things, especially since not all of us really want to re-watch the latest movies. Thankfully George Lucas and his crew are still up to some good with this - the Star Wars Databank. It's a pretty detailed look at the movies, recording all of the characters, locations, events and hardware found in the world.



Google Rotated

<http://blog.outercourt.com/rotated/>

Google has certainly turned the world on its head with its search engine and later with its other website offerings, so much so that it's become the subject of quite a few spoof sites. The latest is aptly called Google Rotated, a site featuring the search engine on the side. There's not much point in the site, but it works 100%, even giving you lopsided results. And if you feel sneaky, you could turn someone's default search option to it...

Zelda Classic

www.zeldaclassic.com

Zelda on the Nintendo Entertainment System (NES) still remains one of the finest RPGs ever made. Or the most time-consuming, but we suppose that's the same thing. The game series has one massive following and Zelda Classic is a fans' own re-creation of the original game, with an added touch. This version includes a level and campaign editor, allowing anyone to make their own quests and submit them to the site. It's free as well, so if you feel like a good old romp into classic gameplay, head right over.



The Duck's Quack

www.acoustics.salford.ac.uk/acoustics_world/duck/duck.htm

A duck's quack doesn't echo, right? Well, alongside that you shouldn't swim directly after a meal and that we use less than 10% of our brain, it's a scientific myth. Apparently a duck's quack does echo, but it's usually too quiet to hear. That didn't deter a bunch of scientists proving the assumption wrong. The University of Salford's Acoustics department did some research and had a duck make a lot of noise in different conditions. The results are on this site, including MP3 and WAV files of the duck's quack, which does indeed echo. Go figure.



X-Entertainment

www.x-entertainment.com

The Eighties were horrible. To prove this assertion: did you know that Freddy from Nightmare on Elm Street fame released a rock album? X-Entertainment told us this as well as a load of other things arguably too scary to talk about. Delve into a festival of cheesy Eighties nostalgia, including movies, toys, food, decoration and all kinds of, well, garbage you could buy during the commercial-centric days of bad hair, bad music and bad clothes. It's just nice to look back and see how much society has changed, how our music and movies are top notch and merchandising is barely a blip on the map... at least in the Eighties it was camp enough to be fun!

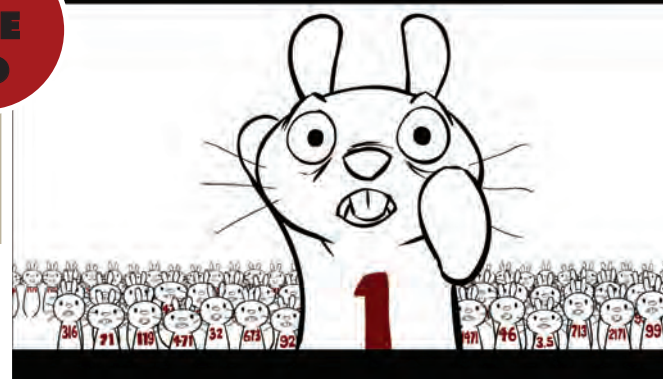


Flashlight

Everyone Has More Sex Than Me

Bernad Derriman, creator of the cult classic Arj and Poopie returns with a hilarious take on a song we can't identify, but the sentiment is obvious. This animation, following the surging trend to make Flash music videos, won several awards and features a rabbit that swears everyone has more sex than him - by the looks of it he's right. A prime piece of animation work, especially if you think Flash is still all about nice interfaces... [I wonder how you stumble across a site like this? Ed].

ON
THE
CD

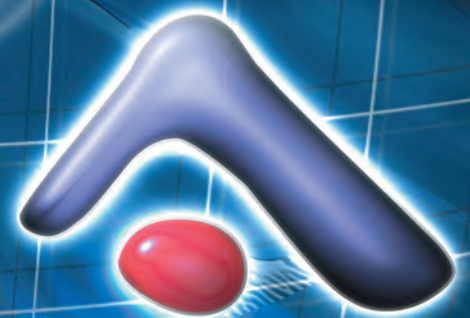


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Populous (1989)

The first God sim ever sees you as a powerful deity who needs to gather followers. The more you had, the stronger you were and the more vengeance you could unleash on other gods and their followers.



Syndicate (1993)

As the head of marketing in a futuristic corporation, your job is to control four cyborgs as they eliminate key targets and sway the markets your way. An instant classic.



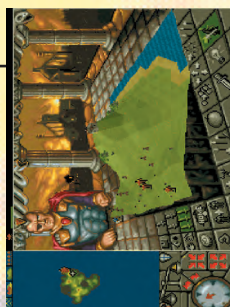
Magic Carpet (1994)

One of the best shooters made, you flew on a magic carpet, attacking monsters and soldiers, gathering mana and building your fortress. Apart from ground-breaking visuals it also featured fully deformable terrain, something that even today's games rarely manage.



Theme Hospital (1995)

One of his undisputed classics: you got to build and run a hospital, which included finding cures for strange illnesses like Elvis Disease and keeping things clean, tidy and hopelessly sane.



Powermonger (1990)

Populous meets Syndicate in this game where you played a Warlord out to plunder nearly 200 territories in his quest for world domination, using the means of war, diplomacy, trade and inventions.



Theme Park (1994)

A game that revolutionized the management genre. Build a theme park, keep your attendees fed and entertained and watch the cash roll in. Fun, addictive and tough – vintage Bullfrog.



Hi-Octane (1995)

Molyneux and Bullfrog's only foray into racing, this high-speed futuristic speeder might have been too short, but it was a blast while it lasted.



Dungeon Keeper (1997)

The game that said it all. Run a dungeon as an evil overlord, hoarding imps, demons, vampires, the undead and all kinds of creatures of the night to keep those pesky villagers and heroes out of your hair. Corrupt the land and you win!



Syndicate Wars (1996)

It might have been a sequel, but Syndicate Wars took the game series to a completely different level. Apart from introducing 3D it also had far more in-depth game play, especially with the new Church of Epoch faction.



Black & White (2001)

A flawed masterpiece, Molyneux returns to his Populous roots, except this time your deity is represented by a large titan-esque creature that you have to raise and train. Of course, it had a mind of its own, placing the game well above any point-and-command god sim.

With the arrival of Fable and Black & White 2 on its way, let's take a look at the game list of one of the most prolific development minds around...*

* To maintain a fair-sized list, most sequels have been excluded

LEGACY

Peter Molyneux

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STALKER

Just because you meet me
doesn't mean you're my
buddy... or that I owe you
anything.

(Based on a true story)



Seeing as how we have hit that season where rampant consumerism mugs the Christmas spirit and steals its eggnog, leaving all the poor impulse buyers spending what the hell happened to their life savings come January, I decided to write about it. However, I was strictly forbidden from doing the nice fluffy piece I had planned so, against the very core of my being, I am going to bitch instead. Fasten your seatbelts, kiddies; Soapbox Airways Flight1811420 to Self-Righteous Indignation Land is taxiing down the Loudmouth Runway... turbulence guaranteed.

The only problem with bitching is, of course, that you need something even mildly valid to scream about. The thing I have to complain about is rather unimportant and probably won't make much of a difference to the world at large, but quite frankly, my personal irritation levels with this matter are incredibly high. So here goes...

A while ago I had the dubious distinction of giving away prizes at a major gaming event. All fine and well, I thought, until I gave away my first game. The guy I gave it to - let's call him Emmanuel, which is a chick's name, but anyway - followed me around for the remainder of the weekend, irritating me to the Nth degree. He begged and pleaded to get more free stuff from me (which I didn't give in to) and only left after I had threatened to punch him so hard it would bruise his grandmother. I thought I was safe. And then the emails started. What Emmanuel wanted was a mention in the magazine. I thought about it for a split second, and then replied, telling him to sod off. I mean, who the hell does this guy think he is? It's not like he did anything special, other than get given free stuff - which would be enough for any normal human being.

He persisted in his mails, despite my nicely worded treatise in response to his initial request, and then proceeded to insult me when he didn't find his name in the November issue. I must admit that the pressure of poorly written, miss-spelled emails flooding into my inbox got too much - obviously a complete lack of intelligence can't be reasoned with, and so I finally relented.

So, here you go, Emmanuel - here's your mention. Now you can go tell all your equally idiotic friends that you are famous. Big whoop. If, by any chance, you know this guy - and have more brains than he does (which won't be hard... I have encountered smarter dung beetles) please kick him in the fork for me. Twice. Make sure the damage is total, because the last thing we want is this cretin breeding.

And if any others out there think that Emmanuel had a good idea, and want to give it a try yourselves, do me a favour... go stand in front of a mirror, look yourself sternly in the eye, and punch yourself in the mouth. You will get more joy from that than you will from nagging me. [Phew, Ed]

A NAGGING SUSPICION 2

art & words by Walt Pretorius



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replay itv media (pty) ltd

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ed@nag.co.za
+27 83 409 8220

lead guitar:
james francis
james@nag.co.za

booking agent:
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+27 84 594 9909

spin doctor:
jacqui jacobs
jacqui@nag.co.za
+27 82 778 8439

rhythm guitar & backing vocals:
lauren das neves
lauren@nag.co.za

bass guitar:
walt pretorius

drums:
edouard dracon

with special thanks to:
adam lieberman
alex jelagin
alex scanlin
andrew stephens
anton lines
derek dela fuente
edouard dracon
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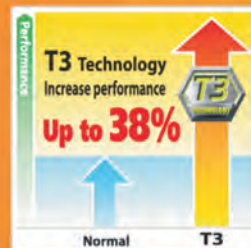
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Power Optimization Tuning:

Set the best power balance for the selected clock to enhance product stability and avoid overheating.



V-TUNER 2 provides a user-friendly and simple interface for overclocking. It dynamically adjusts core and memory clocks, allowing users to get the most out of their GIGABYTE graphics card.



Software Bonus Pack: Up to \$150 Value! **



**Software bundle varies based on model. For more information, visit the GIGABYTE Web site or refer to packaging.

* The performance is for reference only, may change with different system configurations.

GV-N57128DP



- Powered by NVIDIA Geforce 5700 GPU
- Support AGP 8x
- High Performance 128MB DDR
- Features 128-bit memory interface
- Support Gigabyte V-TUNER 2 overclocking application
- Feature DVI, TV-OUT and D-Sub connectors
- Bundles: PowerDVD



GV-N57L128DP



- Powered by NVIDIA Geforce 5700LE GPU
- Support AGP 8x
- High Performance 128MB DDR
- Features 128-bit memory interface
- Support Gigabyte V-TUNER 2 overclocking application
- Feature DVI, TV-OUT and D-Sub connectors
- Bundles: PowerDVD, SpellForce & Order of Dawn



GV-N55128DP



- Powered by NVIDIA Geforce 5500 GPU
- Support AGP 8x
- High Performance 128MB DDR
- Features 64-bit memory interface
- Support Gigabyte V-TUNER 2 overclocking application
- Feature DVI, TV-OUT and D-Sub connectors
- Bundles: PowerDVD



* These speed settings are not guaranteed by GIGABYTE.
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